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Virat's touch and class of Karthik help RCB win

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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In a 1st, UN adopts pact demanding Gaza ceasefire

The resolution urges for ceasefire till the end of Ramadan

UNITED NATIONS, 25 MARCH

The United Nations Security Council on Monday demanded a ceasefire in Gaza during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, its first call to halt fighting.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu immediately cancelled a planned visit to Washington by a high-level delegation to protest the decision.

The resolution passed 14-0 after the US decided not to use its veto power and instead abstained on the resolution, which also demanded the release of all hostages taken captive during 7 October. But the measure does not link that demand to the ceasefire after Ramadan, which ends 9 April.

Netanyahu accused the US of "retreating" from what he said had been a "principled position" by allowing the vote to pass without conditioning the ceasefire on the release of hostages held by Hamas.

The Israeli delegation was to present White House officials with plans for an expected ground invasion of the strategic Gaza town of Rafah, where over 1 million Palestinian civilians have sought shelter from the war.

The vote comes after Russia and China vetoed a US-sponsored resolution on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

The vote comes after Russia and China vetoed a US-sponsored resolution on Friday this time by the Americans.

The resolution, put forward by the 10 elected council members, was backed by Russia and China and the 22-nation Arab Group at the United Nations.

A statement issued on Friday by the Arab Group appealed to all 15 council members "to act with unity and urgency" and vote for the resolution "to halt the bloodshed, preserve human lives and avert further human suffering and destruction."

Because Ramadan ends next month, the ceasefire demand would last for just two weeks, though the draft says the pause in fighting should lead "to a permanent ceasefire."

Since the start of the war, the Security Council has adopted two resolutions on the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza, but none has called for a cease-fire.

Gaza also faces a dire humanitarian emergency, with a report from an international authority on hunger warning 18 March that "famine is imminent" in northern Gaza and that escalation of the war could push half of the territory's 2.3 million people to the brink of starvation.

The United States has vetoed three resolutions demanding a ceasefire, the most recent an Arab-backed measure on 20 February. That resolution was supported by 13 council members with one abstention.

Russia and China vetoed a US-sponsored resolution in late October calling for pauses in the fighting to deliver aid, the protection of civilians and a halt to arming Hamas. They said it did not reflect global calls for a ceasefire. *—PTI*

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'ABSURD AND LUDICROUS'

China continues to harp on its claim over Arunachal

BEIJING, 25 MARCH

China on Monday continued to claim that Arunachal Pradesh is part of its territory, notwithstanding India dismissing Beijing's claim as "absurd" and "ludicrous".

On Monday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian reiterated China's claim reacting to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's assertions on Saturday, dismissing China's repeated claims on Arunachal Pradesh as "ludicrous" and that the frontier state was a "natural part of India".

"This is not a new issue. I mean China has laid claim, it has expanded its claim. The claims are ludicrous to begin with and remain ludicrous today," Jaishankar said in response to a question on the Arunachal issue after delivering a lecture at the prestigious Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) of the National University of Singapore (NUS). Zangnan, China's official name for Arunachal Pradesh, was always part of China before it was "illegally occupied" by India, Lin claimed.

Claiming that it is an "indisputable fact", he said India has established the "so-called Arunachal Pradesh" in 1987

Lin Jian **PHOTO: BLOOMBERG**

on the illegally occupied territory. "We have issued strong statements against their actions and stressed their action is ineffective and this position of China has not been changed", Lin said.

This is the fourth time this month China spoke about its claim over Arunachal Pradesh. Beijing said it has lodged a diplomatic protest with India over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Arunachal Pradesh on 9 March reiterating its claim over the area. China, which claims Arunachal Pradesh as South Tibet, routinely objects to the Indian leaders' visits to the state to highlight its claims. Beijing has also named the area as Zangnan.

China's defence minister has also claimed that Arunachal Pradesh was part of Chinese territory, a claim dismissed by the Ministry of External Affairs last week. *—PTI*

Holi colour triggers fire in Ujjain temple, 14 injured

UJJAIN, 25 MARCH

Fourteen priests, including 'sevaks' (assistants), were injured in a fire that broke out in Mahakal Temple in Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh on Monday during 'bhasma aarti'. The blaze took place in the 'garbha griha' (sanctum sanctorum) of the temple at around 5.50am, Ujjain Collector Neeraj Kumar Singh said. "Fourteen priests suffered burn injuries. Some are being treated in the district hospital here, while eight have sought treatment in Indore. A magisterial probe has been ordered. *—PTI*

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HUES OF JOY

People play with colours during Holi celebrations, in Palace Grounds, Bengaluru, on Monday. Amidst a severe water crisis, many Bengalureans opted for dry Holi celebrations owing to a ban on the use of potable water for Holi parties. City administration had issued strict instructions for Holi party organisers and warned them against using excessive water during cultural events. **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Boeing CEO to quit soon, board head may exit too

VIRGINIA, 25 MARCH

Boeing CEO Dave Calhoun will step down from the embattled plane maker at the end of the year after a series of mishaps at one of America's most storied manufacturers. Board Chair Larry Kellner has also told the company he doesn't plan to stand for re-election. Boeing also said Monday that Stan Deal, president and CEO of its commercial airplanes unit, will retire from the company. Stephanie Pope will now lead the division. The Federal Aviation Administration has put the company under intense scrutiny and recently ordered an audit of assembly lines at a Boeing factory near Seattle, where the company builds planes like the Alaska Airlines 737 Max that suffered a door-panel blowout on 5 January. Investigators say bolts that help keep the panel in place were missing after repair work at the Boeing factory. The incident has raised scrutiny of Boeing to its highest level since two crashes of Boeing 737 Max jets in 2018 and 2019 that killed 346 people. *—PTI*

No hike in property tax, says BBMP Commissioner

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

Chief Commissioner of Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), Tushar Girinath, has clarified that there will be no increase in property tax under the jurisdiction of BBMP. The clarification comes in response to viral videos on social media claiming an impending hike in property tax from 1 April. Girinath labelled these claims as "fake" and urged the public not to be misled by such news.

In a press statement, he noted that the property tax rates set in 2016 remain unchanged and will continue to be in effect.

He also stated that legal action will be taken against those responsible for spreading false information about property tax.

Taking it to X, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar

Tushar Girinath **PHOTO: X/ @BBMPCOMM**

said, "It has been brought to my notice that fake news peddlers are peddling fake news on social media regarding the increase in property tax rate by the BBMP from 1 April, 2024.

I would like to clear thve air here for Bengaluru residents that BBMP has not hiked any property tax, which will continue to be levied at the same rate as was prescribed in 2016. Please do not believe any rumors regarding the same."

—Salar News

Ex-top cop named accused No. 1 in T'gana tapping row

HYDERABAD, 25 MARCH

Former Telangana Intelligence Bureau chief T Prabhakhar Rao has been named as Accused No 1 in the phone-tapping case.

On Sunday, Hyderabad police arrested two additional superintendents of police (ASP). According to the report, additional deputy commissioner of police (DCP) Thirupathanna and additional superintendent of Police N Bhujanga Rao, who were arrested, worked as ASPs in the Special Intelligence Bureau (SIB) and Intelligence Department respectively. They were sent to judicial custody on Sunday.

A look out notice has also been issued against Rao and two others for not being present during probe and alleged non-cooperation, PTI reported. The lookout notice has also been issued against then deputy commissioner of police of Commissioner's Task Force (a wing of Hyderabad Police) P Radhakrishna and a senior executive of a Telugu TV channel.

Rao, on whose order reams of electronic data is said to have been gathered by illegally tapping the phones of Opposition leaders during the earlier BRS government led by K Chandrashekar Rao, is reportedly in the United States. Home of Shravan Rao, who runs a Telugu TV channel called I News, was also searched.

Sharvan allegedly helped set up phone-tapping equipment (from Israel) and servers on the premises of a local school.

According to the Telangana Police, both the arrested ASPs allegedly colluded with suspended state intelligence bureau (SIB) deputy superintendent of police (DSP) D Praneeth Rao.

Rao was earlier arrested for allegedly erasing the intelligence information from various electronic gadgets as well as for alleged phone tapping during the previous BRS government.

A Hyderabad Police statement said that the two arrested police officials confessed to alleged involvement in conspiracy to monitor private persons illegally by developing their profiles and abusing their official positions.

—Salar News

EU opens probe against Apple, Meta, Google

BRUSSELS, 25 MARCH

European Union (EU) regulators opened investigations into Apple, Google and Meta on Monday, the first cases under a sweeping new law designed to stop Big Tech companies from cornering digital markets. Regulators are looking into whether Google and Apple are fully complying with the Digital Markets Act's (DMA) rules requiring tech companies to allow app developers to direct users to cheaper options available outside their app stores. *—AP*

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BWSSB fines 22 families for water wastage

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) imposed a fine of Rs 5,000 on 22 families in City for wasting Cauvery water. This was the first instance where the board has imposed a fine on water shortage.

According to data shared by the BWSSB, it has levied a total of 1,05,000 in 21 cases in seven different divisions.

BWSSB acted on the complaints received through social media, where people were found using drinking water to clean cars, gardens, and other purposes.

According to BWSSB, 13 cases were registered in the southeast alone, resulting in the collection of fines amounting to Rs 65,000. These cases represent the highest number of reported water violations in the southeast zone.

BWSSB has also banned the use of Cauvery water and borewell water for activities like pool dances and rain dances during Holi celebrations.

BWSSB has also banned the use of Cauvery water and borewell water for activities like pool and rain dances during Holi **PHOTO:PTI**

To further conserve water, BWSSB has mandated the installation of aerators in commercial establishments, apartments, restaurants, luxury hotels, and other public areas to regulate water flow from taps. Additionally, the government is considering treated wastewater as an alternative to Cauvery water for non-essential purposes, aiming to recharge dried lakes in the city using this resource.

However, despite the ban, Holi parties with rain dances were held.. Video capturing this violation went viral on social media, drawing considerable backlash. However, the apartment in Varthur, one of the locations involved, claimed that the water used for the Holi party was recycled.

When Salar News reached out to BWSSB officials it was found that no complaint had been registered with BWSSB regarding the same.

—Salar News

A breakdown of the fines

East Bengaluru
- 3 families fined
- Fine collected: ₹15,000

North Bengaluru
- 3 families fined
- Fine collected: ₹15,000

Southwest Bengaluru
- 3 families fined
- Fine collected: ₹15,000

Southeast Bengaluru
- 13 families fined
- Fine collected: ₹65,000

SSLC student dies by suicide in Sagar

SHIVAMOGGA, 25 MARCH

A 16-year-old boy allegedly hung himself from a ceiling fan at his home in Yadehalli village of Sagar taluk of this district, police said on Monday. He was slated to appear for the upcoming SSLC examinations, police said. It is yet to be ascertained if he was in stress due to the tests. Just hours before he ended his life, his parents had got into a fight. . Earlier this month, he had tried to kill himself by standing in-front of a railway track but people spotted him and brought him back home safely, a senior police officer said. "He was slated to appear for the SSLC examination, and we need to investigate if he was under any kind of stress due to the examination. If you need emotional support, please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777. *—PTI*

Treated water in Kengeri lake not meant for drinking

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

The Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board is pumping treated water into Kengeri Lake, but authorities warn residents not to use it for drinking or domestic purposes. Ram Prasath Manohar, Chairman of the Board, clarified in a press release that this treated water is scientifically processed wastewater meant to recharge Bengaluru's depleting groundwater. The National Green Authority and Pollution Control Board also asked not to use this water for daily consumption. This initiative comes amid Bengaluru's growing water crisis. . The process has already begun at Kengeri Lake and will soon expand to Dubasipalya, Hosakerehalli, and Halagevaderahalli lakes. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Priyank mocks Modi govt over 'zero' development

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

State Rural Development, Panchayat Raj and IT-BT Minister Priyank Kharge ridiculed Prime Minister Narendra Modi on X for the Modi government's failure in the last decade on Monday. Priyank said that 10 years ago, BJP sowed the dreams of the future and asked for votes and they are still using past issues to plead votes hinting that there have not been any achievements since the last decade. "Acche din did not arrive, two crore jobs were not created, and promised economic equality in the society is not achieved. They are not ready to disclose information about State Bank of India," Priyank said. "The man who does not stand by his words is using the name of Lord Ram to win elections. he added. *—Salar News*

Political leaders visit temples ahead of elections

CHIKKAMAGALURU, 25 MARCH

As the Lok Sabha elections draw nearer, political leaders in Chikkamagaluru have been making fervent visits to temples in the region, seeking blessings and support from religious institutions. This comes just days after former chief minister BS Yediyurappa's family made a significant visit to Horanadu Anna poorneshwari temple in Chikkamagaluru, where they performed a Chandi Yagya--Chandi. BJP State President BY Vijayendra and his wife also participated in a ritual conducted under the guidance of nine head priests. Before the yagya, the Yediyurappa family partook in circumambulating the temple and offering special prayers to Annapoorneshwari, demonstrating their reverence and devotion to the divine. *—Salar News*

Cong slams 'petty' BJP govt for withholding funds

Nirmala Sitharaman insists that all funds have been released

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

Congress on Monday accused Modi government of withholding funds that should "rightfully" go to Karnataka. They said the people of the State are being made to pay the price just because they exercised their democratic right to elect a Congress government.

Congress General Secretary In-Charge, Communications, Jairam Ramesh alleged Prime Minister Narendra Modi is constantly trying to "throttle" the finances of India's states.

His remarks came after Chief Minister Siddaramaiah alleged on X that Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is consistently denying the written word.

"The interim report of the 15 FC (Finance Commission) for 2020-21 sanctioned Rs 6,764 crore for three states, viz Karnataka (Rs 5,495 crores), Telangana (Rs 723 crores) and Mizoram (Rs 546 crores)," Siddaramaiah said.

"These grants were recommended not because of any special love for these states. These were recommended to ensure that no state receives a lower share in devolution in absolute numbers than the previous year," he said.

In the final report, the 15th Finance Commission also recommended Rs 6,000 crore for Karnataka, Rs 3,000 crore for revival of water bodies and Rs 3,000 crore for the Peripheral Ring Road for Bengaluru, he said. Finance Ministry refused to accept these two recommendations, thus denying the rightful share for Karnataka, Siddaramaiah said.

"Smt @nsitharaman avare, we are not asking for funds to our 5 Guarantees. We have adequate provision for those in our budget, thank you," the chief minister said.

"Since you don't seem to have any faith in or commitment to the federal polity enshrined in our Constitution, you don't seem to understand the concept of rightful share of the states. Kannadigas demand their share. They are not begging," Siddaramaiah said. Tagging Siddaramaiah's post, Ramesh said the Modi government and its "remote-controlled ministers" will cross every line to violate the spirit of federalism, sidestep the recommendations of constitutional bodies and unleash their political vendettas.

Finance Commission has sanctioned ₹5,495 cr for Karnataka *PHOTO: PTI*

- The 15th Finance Commission also recommended Rs 6,000 crore for Karnataka, Rs 3,000 crore for revival of water bodies and Rs 3,000 crore for Peripheral Ring Road for Bengaluru

Even though State contributes Rs 4.3 lakh crore each year in taxes, the finance minister, incidentally a member of the Rajya Sabha from Karnataka, has rejected these recommendations and withheld almost Rs 12,000 crore in funds that should rightfully go to the state, he claimed.

"While Modi enjoyed talking about states' problems and complaining about the share of funds going to Gujarat, Modi constantly tries to throttle the finances of India's states," Ramesh alleged.

"A few months ago, a top NITI Aayog official revealed that the Modi Sarkar had tried to intimidate the 14th Finance Commission into lowering the recommended share of taxes to states," he claimed. *—PTI*

'SPECIAL SPACE IN MY HEART'

Back in BJP, Shettar hopeful of winning Belagavi

HUBBALLI, 25 MARCH

Back with BJP after briefly flirting with the ruling Congress, veteran leader Jagadish Shettar, who is in the fray for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, said he was confident of being elected to the Lower House of Parliament from Belagavi district.

"I am in regular contact with all fellow party workers and the people in Belagavi. This place holds a special place in my heart. I am confident of repaying the faith that the party has vested in me. I am hopeful of being elected an MP from the Belagavi district," Shettar said.

BJP on Sunday released its fifth list of 111 candidates for Lok Sabha elections. Former Karnataka Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar, who recently returned to the party from the Congress, was fielded from Belagavi while former State minister K Sudhakar will contest from Chikkaballapur.

Shettar will contest Belagavi in place of sitting MP Mangala Angadi, who was denied re-nomination.

Shettar, who quit BJP and switched over to Congress after being denied a ticket to contest last year's assembly elections, returned to his old party in January. The 28 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka will poll in two phases-on 26 April and 7 May. *—ANI*

Jagadish Shettar *PHOTO: PTI*

- BJP on Sunday released its fifth list of 111 candidates for Lok Sabha elections. The 28 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka will poll in two phases-on 26 April and 7 May.

Mining baron Janardhana joins BJP

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

Former Karnataka Minister and mining baron G Janardhana Reddy on Monday rejoined BJP ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

Gangavati MLA, who is an accused in an illegal mining case, had formed 'Kalyana Rajya Pragati Paksha' (KRPP) ahead of the State assembly polls last year, snapping his two-decade-old association with BJP.

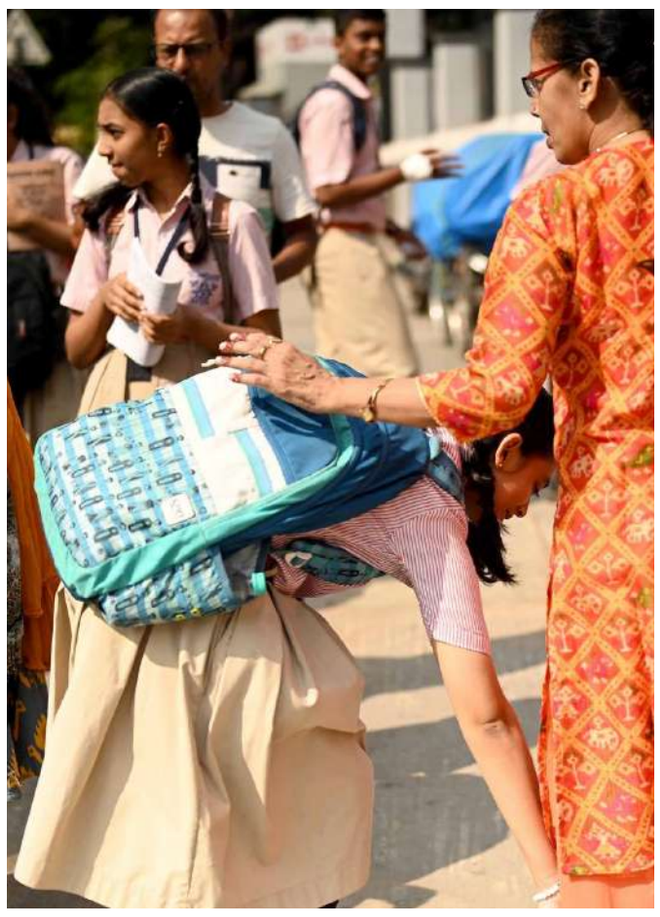
Reddy today merged his KRPP with BJP as he, along with his wife Aruna Lakshmi and some family members, joined the party in the presence of its veteran leader and former Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa, state President BY Vijayendra, and others.

Calling it a "homecoming", Reddy explained that the move to merge KRPP with BJP is to "strengthen Modi's hands and make him the Prime Minister third time". Praising Yediyurappa and the leader's contribution to his political growth, Reddy said he is happy that he will be working in the party now with the veteran leader's son Vijayendra.

Reddy and his brother-in-law BV Srinivas Reddy, managing director of Obalapuram Mining Company (OMC), were arrested by CBI on 5 September, 2011. The company is accused of changing mining lease boundary markings and indulging in illegal mining in the Ballari Reserve Forest area, spread over Ballari in Karnataka and the Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh. *—PTI*

Gali Janardhana Reddy, Aruna Lakshmi join BJP in Bengaluru on Monday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

SSLC EXAMS BEGIN



A student takes the blessing of her guardian ahead of SSLC exam at St. Anne's School, in Bengaluru on Monday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Ramanagara MLA booked for distributing sarees

RAMANAGARA, 25 MARCH

The election officials booked a case against Ramanagara MLA Iqbal Hussain on charges of unlawful distribution of sarees to voters. According to the complaint lodged against the MLA, he was trying to ply voters by gifting sarees. They also filed the case against his wife as well.

Anil, a staunch supporter of the MLA, has been named as the primary accused in the case. Upon receiving intelligence from members of both JD(S) and BJP, police conducted a thorough inspection of a private company's logistics facility in Ward 1 of Ramanagara.

The estimated value of the seized sarees amounted to approximately Rs 14,00,000. The confiscated goods have been taken into police custody. Anil and the proprietors of NM Granites facing legal repercussions based on courier bills, GST documentation, and recipient information.

A joint press conference was convened by BJP and JD(S) youth leader Nikhil Kumaraswamy. He raised pertinent questions regarding the way the district administration and police handled the matter. *—Salar News*

Mansoor Ali Khan, Congress candidate from Bengaluru Central; Minister of Housing BZ Zameer Ahmed Khan, Shivajinagar MLA Rizwan Arshad and others participate in a meeting held at KPCC office to discuss the campaign plan for upcoming Bengaluru Central Lok Sabha poll *PHOTO: SALAR*

JD(S) workers oppose HDK's eye on Mandya

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

Speculations within JD(S) that its State President HD Kumaraswamy is likely to contest from the Mandya Lok Sabha segment, has led to opposition from a section of its workers in Channapatna Assembly constituency that he currently represents.

The party's core committee leaders are likely to meet here on Tuesday to decide on the candidates for Kolar, Hassan and Mandya, the three seats from where the regional party will be contesting, as part of the seat-sharing deal with the BJP. With speculation rife that Kumaraswamy is most likely to contest from Mandya, party workers and leaders from Channapatna met him on Monday and demanded that he should not "abandon them" and should continue to represent them in the Assembly. *—PTI*

Groupism delays Cong's call on Kolar candidates

KOLAR, 25 MARCH

Congress in Kolar (SC) Lok Sabha constituency is facing an inordinate delay in selecting a candidate due to two warring factions.

The two factions, one led by State Food Minister KH Muniyappa and the other by former Speaker Ramesh Kumar, are both sticking to their stand over the selection of a candidate from the Left or Right hand section of the Scheduled castes.

Muniyappa is keen on getting the ticket to the Left Hand sect of the Scheduled castes, while Kumar is demanding a ticket for a person from the Right Hand sect.

On the other hand, Kumar is arguing that since voters belonging to the Right Hand sect are more compared to the Left Hand sect, a person from the Right Hand sect should be accommodated. Kolar Lok Sabha constituency has more Scheduled Caste voters, especially in Bangarpet and KGF Assembly segments, and both the constituencies are represented by people from each sect.

The factions began during the last Lok Sabha elections when the group of legislators led by Ramesh openly opposed Congress candidate KH Muniyappa, who had represented Kolar constituency seven times in a row. Muniyappa's dream of making it to eight times was shattered when Congress leaders joined hands with BJP nominee S Muniswamy, who sailed through by over 2 lakh votes, thus opening BJP's account for the first time.

With Congress being in power, most of the party leaders are of the firm opinion that if a united fight is put up, the party can wrest the constituency from BJP. The sitting BJP MP from Muniswamy being denied a ticket has also caused some resentment among BJP cadre. *—Salar News*

Slap those chanting Modi: Tangadagi stirs new row

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

Youths and students who raise "Modi, Modi" slogans should be slapped, State Minister Shivaraj Tangadagi said, as he attacked BJP-led government at the Centre. He accused the Centre of not honouring the promise to create 2 crore jobs per year.

The Kannada and Culture Minister also said BJP should be ashamed to ask for votes in the Lok Sabha elections as, he alleged, it has failed on the development front as well.

"They should be ashamed, with what face are they coming to seek votes. They are incompetent to do even a single development work. They had promised to give two crore jobs. Did they give jobs to anyone? When asked for jobs they say -- sell 'pakoras'. They should be ashamed," Tangadagi said.

Addressing a Congress workers' meeting at Karatagi in Koppal on Sunday, he said: "One has to be ashamed. Is it a small thing? They promised 2 crore jobs a year, it should have been 20 crore jobs now in 10 years," he added.

Shivaraj Tangadagi *PHOTO: FB*

Senior BJP leader and party's former national General Secretary CT Ravi hit out at Congress over the Minister's comments.

"Realising that CONgress is going to lose the upcoming Lok Sabha elections very badly, CONgis are stooping to new lows. And they call PM Modi a dictator!" he posted on 'X'. BJP has petitioned the Election Commission seeking strict action against the Minister. He should be barred from the election process and from campaigning in favour of the Congress, the BJP said, calling it a clear violation of the Model Code of Conduct. Accusing Tangadagi of instigating Congress workers against BJP voters and said it may create fear. —Salar News

DAUGHTER SEEKS HELP

Mangaluru man languishes in Saudi jail

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

The daughter of a 65-year-old man, who has been languishing in Saudi Arabia's jail for the past nine months, has appealed to Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and also urged the Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar's help in bringing back her father to the country.

Speaking to **Salar News** Shainaz Banu said that her father Dandakere Ismail, a resident of Ombatthukere, near Mangaluru, has been working in Riyadh and Dammam, for the past 27 years. "My father has been languishing in jail as someone has cheated him and foisted a false case against him, he is unwell and we are in dire straits as he is the sole breadwinner of the family."

Dandakere Ismail *PHOTO: SALAR*

In a letter to the Foreign Minister, Banu copies of which are with Salar News, she said that her father has been running a dry cleaning business in partnership with a local Saudi sponsor for 10 years but the business saw a downfall and Ismail was unable to pay the sponsor his money.

Ismail took a loan of 9,000 Saudi Riyals (Rs 2,00,000) from an Egyptian to pay shop rent. The local sponsor handed over the shop to someone else without giving him any money he had invested in it. His brother-in-law Hassan Mohammed said, "I received a telephone call from the Indian Embassy in Riyadh stating that there was a financial issue involved and the embassy was trying to sort it out with the help of philanthropists and charitable institutions."

Hassan claimed the Egyptian forged a promissory note demanding 30,000 Saudi Riyals (Nearly Rs. 7 lakh) from Ismail which led to his arrest.

Ismail's wife, a paralysis patient, has only two daughters. Banu said, "For nine months, we have been unable to pay the house rent, buy medicine for our mother, and we also cannot provide any legal help to rescue our father."

Home Minister G Parameshwara had told the Legislative Assembly earlier that the State government will create a separate ministry to take care of the affairs of Non-Resident Indian Kannadigas. *—Salar News*

Assam MLA quits Cong after wife fails to get LS ticket

GUWAHATI, 25 MARCH

Bharat Chandra Narah, MLA of Naoboicha in Assam's Lakhimpur district, resigned from the Congress on Monday after his wife failed to get a ticket from the party for the Lok Sabha elections. Congress announced Uday Shankar Hazarika as its candidate for the Lakhimpur Lok Sabha seat. Narah was hopeful that his party would nominate his wife Ranee Narah, a former Union minister, for the seat. "I do hereby resign from the Indian National Congress with immediate effect," the MLA said in his one-line resignation letter to Party President Mallikarjun Kharge. On Sunday, Narah resigned from the post of the chairman of Assam Congress' media cell. He is a five-time MLA from Dhakuakhana constituency, and became a Legislator for the sixth term in 2021. Prior to joining Congress, he was with the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP). Narah has been a cabinet minister in both the AGP and Congres governments. He was also the press advisor to then chief minister Tarun Gogoi. *—PTI*

Posters target BJP's Sandeshkhali 'victim' candidate

KOLKATA, 25 MARCH

Handwritten posters appeared in a few places in Sandeshkhali area denouncing the candidature of BJP Lok Sabha poll nominee Rekha Patra, an alleged victim of torture at the hands of arrested and now-suspended TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh and his aides. BJP has pointed fingers at the TMC for this, while the ruling party of West Bengal rejected the charge. Patra, who is yet to join BJP officially, was fielded from Basirhat Lok Sabha seat. Sandeshkhali is part of that constituency. Posters bearing slogans such as "We don't want Rekha as a candidate" and "We don't want Rekha Patra as BJP candidate" were found on Monday, a day after the BJP announced her nomination from the seat. *—PTI*

TN min booked over derogatory remarks against PM

CHENNAI, 25 MARCH

A case has been registered against Tamil Nadu Fisheries Minister Anitha R Radhakrishnan for his alleged derogatory remarks on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at a recent meeting of the DMK party workers, police said on Monday. A case under section 294 B of the IPC (uttering obscene words in public) has been registered against Radhakrishnan by the Meignanapuram police following a complaint by the BJP Thoothukudi south district president R Sidhrangathan, a senior police official said. Radhakrishnan's uttering was "disgusting and despicable and he criticised the Prime Minister for lauding late Chief Minister Kamaraj," Sidhrangathan said. *—PTI*

Karti files nomination from TN's Sivaganga

SIVAGANGA, 25 MARCH

Karti Chidambaram, son of veteran Congress leader P Chidambaram, filed his nomination from the Sivaganga Lok Sabha seat here on Monday. Karti had won from the Sivaganga constituency in 2019 and has been entrusted with the responsibility again for the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha polls on 19 April. "I'm thankful for the Congress party, for reposing faith in me again and allowing me to contest for the third time. I am very grateful to my party leadership... The entire alliance has come together. The three ministers from the DMK, DMK MLA, and Congress MLA were with me," Karti told ANI after filing nomination. "The INDIA alliance will overwhelmingly win the Sivaganga seat as it will win every seat in Tamil Nadu. From the 1st March we will start a proper campaign where we'll reach out to the public," he added. *—ANI*

Post Kejri's arrest, AAP boycotts Holi celebrations

Atishi urges people to join them in the fight against evil

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

When the entire country is drenched in the colours of the Holi celebration, the leaders of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) continued their protest against the arrest of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in connection with the Delhi Excise Policy case linked to a money laundering case.

Delhi Minister and AAP leader Atishi said on Monday that they have resolved not to play with colours and celebrate Holi this year and appealed to the countrymen to join them in the fight against cruelty and evil.

"Holi is not just a festival, but a symbol of the victory of good over evil, a symbol of justice over cruelty. Today, every leader of Aam Aadmi Party is fighting this evil, cruelty and injustice day and night. This year, Aam Aadmi Party has resolved that we will not play with colours, we will not celebrate Holi," the AAP leader posted on X.

Launching a veiled attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi of eliminating democracy from the country, Atishi posted, "Because the cruel dictator has put the beloved Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal of Delhi in jail. Today, they have left no stone unturned in their efforts to eliminate democracy from the country. I appeal to all of you on this Holi; Come join us in this fight against cruelty and evil. This is not just a fight for AAP, but for the entire Delhi and the country to save democracy."

Earlier on Sunday, Atishi announced that a rally will be organised by the INDIA bloc on 31 March against the arrest of Kejriwal by by ED. *—ANI*

Delhi Education Minister Atishi with AAP supporters at a protest against Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest in New Delhi, on Sunday **PHOTO: ANI**

'Kejri's arrest to divert from electoral bonds'

KANNUR, 25 MARCH

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has said that the electoral bonds scam is the biggest corruption ever witnessed in India and added BJP government at the Centre arrested his Delhi counterpart Arvind Kejriwal to divert attention from the same.

Addressing the third consecutive rally organised by CPI (M) against the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) on Sunday, Vijayan alleged BJP-led Central government and Sangh Parivar give scant regard to the rule of the law in the country.

He alleged that Sangh Parivar was trying to take control of the Constitutional institutions and even threatening the country's judiciary.

The chief minister said when the idea of electoral bonds was floated, the CPI (M) had opposed it as it was a tool for corruption and moved the Supreme Court against it. *—PTI*

AAP LAUNCHES SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Monday launched a social media campaign asking people to support it for saving the constitution and democracy in the country.

Delhi minister and senior AAP leader Atishi addressed a press conference here to launch the social media "Display Picture (DP) campaign", urging people to join in.

She said that all AAP leaders and volunteers will change their profile picture on X, Facebook, WhatsApp and other social media accounts with the new one showing Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal behind the bars captioned "Modi Ka Sabse Bada Dar Kejriwal".

Kejriwal is the only leader in the country who can challenge Prime Minister Narendra Modi so he was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) without any evidence just after the announcement of Lok Sabha polls, Atishi said.

She claimed the ED could not produce even "one Paisa" of evidence despite its two-year-long probe into the alleged excise scam .

Atishi also urged the people to join the social media DP campaign of the party saying saving the democracy and the Constitution was not just Kejriwal's fight. *—PTI*

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge with party leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi during the CWC Meeting in New Delhi **PHOTO:PTI**

Cong releases sixth list of five candidates for Lok Sabha polls

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Congress released its sixth list of five candidates for the Lok Sabha elections in Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu on Monday.

The party has announced four candidates from Rajasthan and one from Tamil Nadu.

In Rajasthan, the party has fielded Ramchandra Choudhary from the Ajmer Lok Sabha seat, Sudarshan Rawat from Rajsamand, Damodar Gurjar from Bhilwara, while Prahlad Gunjal will face Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla in the Kota constituency.

Rajasthan has 25 parliamentary constituencies. The state will vote in two phases. Phase 1 (19 April) will see polling on 12 seats, while the remaining 13 seats will go for polling in the second phase (26 April).

In Tamil Nadu, C Robert Bruce will contest on a Congress ticket from the Tirunelveli constituency.

Tamil Nadu will vote on all 39 Lok Sabha seats on 19 April.

Congress further stated that Tharahai Cuthbert will contest the bye-election from the Vilavancode constituency in Tamil Nadu.

Earlier, the Congress party on Sunday released the fifth list of three candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, naming Pratap Singh Khachariyawas from Jaipur, replacing Sunil Sharma as announced earlier.

While, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday released its fifth list of candidates for the Lok Sabha elections.

BJP has released the names of the candidates for the Lok Sabha seats of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Rajasthan, Haryana, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Mizoram, Sikkim, Telangana, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh.

Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut has been fielded from Himachal Pradesh's Mandi, a stronghold of Congress.The party has also fielded veteran actor Arun Govil, who played the character of Lord Ram in Ramanand Sagar's 'Ramayan' from Uttar Pradesh's Meerut. *—ANI*

Battle heats up between UDF, LDF in Kerala's Kollam

KOLLAM, 25 MARCH

Sitting MP and Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) leader NK Premachandran is facing a tough challenge from ruling LDF's CPI(M) MLA and film-star-turned-politician M Mukesh in Kollam, known for its famous cashew processing units.

Fielding film-star-turned-politician G Krishnakumar, BJP is also trying its luck in the constituency which is dominated by Hindus.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Opposition Congress-led UDF's ally RSP's leader Premachandran had won with 4,99,677 votes out of the total 9,68,123 against his nearest rival, ruling CPI(M)'s K N Balagopal, who secured 3,50,821.

"I do not want to be overconfident and minimise the Opposition candidates. My voters know what I have been doing for them as an MLA for the last two terms, and I seek votes based on what I have done for them," Mukesh said.

When Mukesh was actively seeking votes in the Kollam town area, his rival-- Premachandran, who already has four terms as the MP of Kollam and is presently holding the seat-- was busy meeting the voters at Kundara, about 19 kilometers from Kollam town.

"This is a very important election to keep the BJP away from power and to protect the secular fabric of the nation," Premachandran said.

He said the controversy over his participation in a lunch organised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was created by the CPI(M). He also justified Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's move to contest from Wayanad. *—PTI*

NK Premachandran (L) and CPI(M) MLA M Mukesh **PHOTO: PTI**

LS POLLS

BJP names candidates for 6 seats in Gujarat

AHMEDABAD, 25 MARCH

- The party has replaced Bhatt with Hemang Joshi, while Shobna Baraiya will contest in place of Thakor.Joshi is the Vice-Chairman of Municipal School Board of Vadodara Municipal Corporation. Baraiya is the wife of former BJP MLA from Prantij

Ruling BJP announced the names of six candidates for Lok Sabha polls from Gujarat, including new faces for Vadodara and Sabarkantha where the party nominees earlier withdrew from the fray.

With this, the party has announced the names of candidates for all 26 constituencies where elections are scheduled to be held in a single phase on 7 May.

In its latest list of six candidates released late Sunday night, party dropped five sitting MPs, including Minister of State for AYUSH and Child Development Mahendra Munjpara from Surendranagar.

On Vadodara and Sabarkantha seats, BJP had nominated sitting MP Ranjan Bhatt and Bhikhaji Thakor, respectively. However, on Saturday, two-time MP Bhatt and Thakor withdrew from the fray.

The party has replaced Bhatt with Hemang Joshi, while Shobna Baraiya will contest in place of Thakor.

Joshi is the Vice-Chairman of Municipal School Board of Vadodara Municipal Corporation. Baraiya is the wife of former BJP MLA from Prantij.

BJP has repeated its Junagadh MP Rajesh Chudasama. This is the third time he will be contesting the Lok Sabha elections.

In Surendranagar, BJP has dropped Munjpara and given the ticket to Chandu Shihora. He was former president of the Morbi municipality.

BJP has given ticket to Hari Patel from Mehsana replacing Sardaben Patel. Hari Patel is from Unjha town and a party worker.

For Amreli seat, BJP has replaced its three-term MP Naran Kachhadiya with Bharat Sutariya, who is currently the president of Amreli district panchayat.

Congress has so far declared 17 candidates out of 24 seats it is contesting in Gujarat.

In 2014 and 2019 general elections, the BJP had won all the 26 seats in the state. *—PTI*

Prem Singh Tamang, Pawan Kumar Chamling **PHOTO: X/ WIKIPEDIA**

Sikkim CM to contest from 2 Assembly seats

GANGTOK, 25 MARCH

Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang will contest from two assembly constituencies in the upcoming polls even as his wife Krishna Kumari Rai will take on the opposition SDF's president Pawan Kumar Chamling in Namchi-Singhithang seat.

The ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha on Monday released its candidate list for all the 32 assembly seats and the lone Lok Sabha constituency in the Himalayan state. It re-nominated incumbent MP Indra Hang Subba for the Lok Sabha seat.

The decision to field Tamang from the constituencies of Soreng-Chakung and Rhenock, and his wife against Chamling, a five-term Chief Minister, has been taken by the SKM parliamentary board, Assembly Speaker Arun Kumar Upreti told reporters here.

Upreti has been fielded from Arithang assembly constituency.

The SKM has given tickets to nine ministers and dropped two others.

The ruling party has also dropped the Chief Minister's son Aditya Golay from Soreng-Chakung seat with Tamang himself deciding to contest from there.The SKM also rewarded three BJP defectors -- Rajkumari Thapa, Sonam Venchungpa and Pinsto Namgyal Lepcha -- with tickets from Rangang-Yangyang, Martam-Rumtek and Dzongu seats respectively.

Among the ministers, Kunga Nima Lepcha and Sonam Lama have been fielded from Shyari and Sangha assembly seats respectively, while BS Panth and LB Das have been fielded from Teri Namphing and West Pendam seats respectively.SKM has dropped two ministers, Bishnu Kharel and Karma Loden Bhutia, who had last time won from Rhenock and Kabi Lungchuk seats respectively. *—PTI*

Pradhan returns to electoral fray after 15 yrs

BHUBANESHWAR, 25 MARCH

Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan, who has returned to the electoral fray after a gap of 15 years, visited Jagannath temple in Puri and sought blessings from the sibling deities.

He was accompanied by BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra.

Pradhan has been named as the candidate from Sambalpur, while Patra has been re-nominated from Puri.

Taking to X, Pradhan posted, "Lord Jagannath is an integral part of our social and cultural identity. His blessings have always been upon us. After becoming a candidate for the Lok Sabha from Sambalpur, the holy land of Mother Samlai, it was a great privilege for me to first take the blessings of Lord Jagannath in the temple."

Pradhan, who is a minister in the cabinet of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, returned to contesting elections after a gap of 15 years after he was nominated from Sambalpur Lok Sabha seat, which is the epicentre of western Odisha.

He had last contested elections in 2009, when the alliance between the BJP and the BJD ended. *—PTI*

Dharmendra Pradhan **PHOTO: PTI**

KERALA LS POLLS

K Surendran to take on RaGa in Wayanad

T'PURAM, 25 MARCH

Announcing candidates for the remaining four seats in Kerala, BJP has fielded its state chief K Surendran in the high-profile Wayanad constituency against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

Scholar and former vice-chancellor of Sree Sankara Sanskrit University, KS Radhakrishnan, and actor-turned-politician G Krishnakumar will contest from the Ernakulam and Kollam constituencies respectively, the party announced on Sunday.

TN Sarasu, former government college principal, would seek electoral luck from Alathur in the northern Palakkad district.

The party had earlier announced the candidates for 12 seats. Its ally BDJS will contest four seats in the state.

With the surprise candidature of Surendran in Wayanad, a traditional Congress bastion, the BJP is trying to give a fitting reply to its opponents by fielding a strong candidate against Rahul Gandhi.

Hailing from Ulleyeri in Kozhikode district, Kunnummel Surendran, who began his career as Wayanad district president of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, had unsuccessfully contested from Pathanamthitta in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.In a constituency where Rahul Gandhi won by a margin of over 4 lakh votes in 2019, his rival this time, BJP Kerala chief K Surendran who has been fielded as the party's candidate for Wayanad, said on Monday that Congress leader would face "the same outcome as in Amethi".

"Wayanad is a constituency where there is a development crisis. Rahul Gandhi has done nothing for the constituency. He will meet the same fate in Wayanad as he encountered in Amethi last time," Surendran said.

"The central leadership has entrusted me with a responsibility. They have asked to take up the fight in Wayanad constituency. The people of Wayanad will definitely ask why the senior leaders of INDIA alliance are contesting each other in the same constituency," Surendran added. *—PTI*

K Surendran and Rahul Gandhi **PHOTO: PTI**

PHOTO: PTI

Burglar living in 5 star hotels gets arrested

BHUBANESWAR, 25 MARCH

A burglar, who used to spend nights in five-star hotels, was arrested in Bhubaneswar after being on the run for years, police said on Monday. Parsuram Giri was wanted in at least 21 cases of burglary that happened in the city over the last one year, they said. Giri was caught at a check-post set up in the city in view of elections, they added. "He usually targeted locked residential buildings in the city. He used to break in through the windows to enter the buildings and steal cash and jewellery. He carried out the burglaries singlehandedly," said Police Commissioner Sanjeeb Panda.Among the items seized from his possession were Rs 21 lakh in cash, gold and silver jewellery worth nearly Rs 50 lakh. ***—PTI***

Mumbai woman held with cocaine worth ₹19.79 cr

MUMBAI, 25 MARCH

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) arrested a woman from Sierra Leone at Mumbai international airport with 1,979 grams of cocaine worth Rs 19.79 crore, an official said on Monday.The woman, who had come here from Nairobi in Kenya, was taken into custody on Sunday on a tip off, he said."We found the items she was carrying, like shoes, moisturiser bottle, shampoo bottle etc, were heavy and rigid. When we checked them, we found white powder concealed in these items," the official said.When the powder was tested using a field kit with the apprehending team, it was found to be cocaine, he said."We seized 1,979 grams of cocaine worth Rs 19.79 crore in the illicit market. ***—PTI***

5-yr-old dies after falling off temple chariot in Kerala

KOLLAM, 25 MARCH

A five-year-old child succumbed to her injuries last night after she was crushed under the wheels of a ceremonial chariot during the annual festival at the famous Kottankulangara temple near here, police said. Police said Kshetra, daughter of a Chavara-resident couple, lost her life when she accidently fell under the big tyres of the ceremonial chariot which is pulled by the believers."The accident happened at around 11.30pm on Sunday. She came to the temple along with her parents," police said. A case has been registered in connection with the incident, police added."Sometimes children also pull the rope tied to the chariot. It seems like she fell accidently," police said.The child was rushed to a nearby hospital by her parents and the police but could not be saved.***—PTI***

Fire in Ujjain's Mahakal temple injures 14 priests

MP CM says all victims will get ₹1L each and free treatment

UJJAIN, 25 MARCH

On Monday during 'bhasma aarti',14 priests, including 'sevaks' (assistants), were injured in a fire that broke out in the Mahakal Temple in Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, an official said.

The blaze took place in the 'garbha griha' (sanctum sanctorum) of the temple at around 5.50am, Ujjain Collector Neeraj Kumar Singh said.

"14 priests suffered burn injuries. Some are being treated in the district hospital here, while eight have sought treatment in Indore. A magisterial probe has been ordered. It will be conducted by Zila Panchayat CEO Mrinal Meena and Additional Collector Anukool Jain and a report will be submitted in three days," he said.

"The fire started as 'gulal' (coloured powder used during rituals) fell on the puja thali that contained burning 'kapoor' (camphor). It later spread on the floor and turned into a blaze," he said.

The incident has been captured by CCTV cameras installed in the temple, an official said.

"The fire started after gulal was thrown as part of a ritual on the occasion of Holi.

Madhya Pradesh CM Mohan Yadav visits people injured in a fire that broke out during 'bhasma aarti' on Monday ***PHOTO: PTI***

It caused burn injuries to priests, who were rushed to the district hospital," priest Ashish told reporters.

A large number of people, including some VVIPs, were present during the incident in the Nandi Hall in front of the sanctum sanctorum, but no injuries were reported among the devotees, officials said.In a message on X, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said the incident was unfortunate and added he was in constant touch with the district administration. Yadav told reporters after arriving in Ujjain the injured will be given Rs 1 lakh each as well as the best available treatment for free. ***—PTI***

'CHEMICALS IN GULAL MAY HAVE CAUSED FIRE'

INDORE, 25 MARCH

Madhya Pradesh Minister Kailash Vijayvargiya said the fire at the renowned Mahakal Temple in Ujjain on Monday morning may have been caused by chemicals in 'gulal', a coloured powder used in rituals and during Holi.

"It seems all the injured at SAIMS are out of danger, But they will be under observation for the next 24 hours," Vijayvargiya told reporters after visiting the health facility."Every year, Holi is celebrated in Mahakaleshwar Temple by throwing gulal. Maybe, some chemical in the gulal caused the fire. However, we are not going to stop the tradition of playing Holi with Lord Bholenath in Mahakaleshwar Temple," he said.It will be ensured that no chemical laced gulal is used next time, he added.The magistrate there has ordered an inquiry into the incident and the cause of the fire will be ascertained, he added. ***—PTI***

AFTER 3 DECADES

Dalit candidate wins president seat in JNUSU

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union (JNUSU) has elected its first Dalit president from the Left-backed groups after nearly three decades.

The United Left panel on Sunday effected a clean sweep in the JNUSU elections,

defeating its nearest rival the RSS-affiliated ABVP.

In the polls that were held after a hiatus of four years, Dhananjay from the All India Students' Association (AISA) won the JNUSU president's post by securing 2,598 votes against the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad's (ABVP) Umesh C Ajmeera, who secured 1,676 votes.

Dhananjay hails from Gaya, Bihar and is the first Dalit president from the Left after Batti Lal Bairwa, who was elected in 1996-97.

Speaking to PTI after the win, Dhananjay said, "This victory is a referendum by the students of JNU that they reject the politics of hate and violence.

The students have once again shown their trust in us. We will continue to fight for their rights and work on issues that concern students.

"The safety of women on campus, fund cuts, scholarship hike, infrastructural and water crisis are among the top priorities of the students' union to begin with," he added.

Amid cries of 'Lal Salaam' and 'Jai Bhim', the winning students were hailed by their supporters, who waved red, white and blue flags to celebrate.Avijit Ghosh from the Students' Federation of India (SFI) defeated ABVP's Deepika Sharma by 927 votes to win the vice-president's post. Ghosh received 2,409 votes as against Sharma's 1,482.Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students' Association (BAPSA) candidate Priyanshi Arya, who was supported by the Left, won the general secretary's post by defeating ABVP's Arjun Anand by 926 votes. Arya got 2,887 votes while Anand received 1,961. The United Left extended its support to Arya after the Election Committee cancelled the nomination of its candidate Swati Singh when her candidacy was challenged by the ABVP. ***—PTI***

2 temple bases found in Ambajogai

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR 25 MARCH

Archaeology department of the Maharashtra government finds two temple bases during the excavation in Sakaleshwar temple premises near Ambajogai in Beed district, an official said on Monday.

The Sakaleshwar temple, also known as the Barakhambi temple, was built in 1228 AD by the Yadava dynasty, who ruled from Devgiri Fort, as per an inscription found earlier, the official said.

"The excavation began on 15 and 14 March trenches of 100 square feet each have been created. We have found bases of two temples, one of which is Kholeshwar, named after a Yadava general. We have found some bricks, which show the temples had shikhars, as well as sculpture parts like hands, feet," Amot Gote, Assistant Director of State Archeology, told PTI.

The Sakaleshwar temple, also known as the Barakhambi temple, was built in 1228 AD ***PHOTO: X***

As part of the same project, we will undertake a survey of ancient monuments in Ambajogai, which will help give the area the status of a "heritage village", he added.

'"The town of Ambajogai was also known as Amrapur, Jayantipur, Jogaiambe in earlier times. It was also known as Mominabad during the Hyderabad Nizam Era. It has other monuments like Hatthikhana, Dasopant Temple, Yogeshwari temple," Gote informed. ***—PTI***

R'than villagers walk on fire to celebrate Holi

DUNGARPUR, 25 MARCH

Holi, the festival of colours celebrated all across India, not only marks the arrival of spring in the country, but it is much more than just that.

Apart from playing with colours, enjoying snacks, drinks, etc., various other traditions and beliefs are prevalent in the country.

One such tradition is walking barefoot on the embers after Holika Dahan in Kokapur village of Dungarpur district in Rajasthan.

Even today, the people of Kokapur village have kept this tradition, which has been going on for years, alive.

On the next day of Holika Dahan, the villagers walk barefoot on the embers.

The villagers believe that by doing so they will remain healthy for the whole year. They also believe that their wishes be granted and absolve them of all sadness and problems.

PHOTO: PTI

Holi, a festival celebrated with as much fervour in the country as it is overseas, will be marked on 25 March, Monday, this year.

The festival is preceded by a ritual of lighting bonfires called Holika Dahan, signifying the burning of the demon Holika. ***—ANI***

BHOJSHALA WAS A TEMPLE: ARCHAEOLOGIST

GWALIOR, 25 MARCH

Noted archaeologist KK Muhammed has claimed the contentious Bhojshala/Kamal Maula Mosque complex in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district was a Saraswati temple and later converted into an Islamic place of worship.

He stressed that Hindus and Muslims should abide by the court's decision and honour the Places of Worship Act 1991, and sit together to iron out differences over such places.

Muslims should also respect the sentiments of Hindus over Mathura and Kashi, he said on Sunday.

Following directives from the Madhya Pradesh High Court, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is carrying out a survey of the disputed Bhojshala complex in MP's tribal-dominated district.

Hindus believe it is a temple of Goddess Vagdevi (Saraswati) and the Muslim community calls Kamal Maula Mosque.

"The historical fact about Dhar (Bhojshala) is that it was a Saraswati temple. It was converted into an Islamic mosque. But as per the Places of Worship Act 1991, the cut-off year is 1947. If it was a temple in 1947 then it is a temple and if it was a mosque, then it is a mosque," said Muhammed, a former ASI official.

"Both sides should stick to the Act. The High Court will take a decision considering all facts. All should follow it (HC decision) as that will be the only solution," he said. "Muslims should understand the sentiments of Hindus. Kashi is associated with Lord Shiva and Mathura is the birthplace of Lord Krishna. The Hindus can't shift them to other places but these are only mosques for Muslims, They (mosques) can be shifted elsewhere," he said. ***—PTI***

IN PORBANDAR

Coast Guard saves fishing crew from sinking boat

PORBANDAR, 25 MARCH

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) rescued five fishermen from a sinking Indian fishing boat Premsagar, at mid-sea, approximately 50km from Porbandar on Sunday.

The ICG's action came in response to an SOS call.

ICG Ship C-16 sailed immediately from Porbandar after input from the fisheries community regarding the sinking boat was received at Maritime Rescue Sub Centre Porbandar of Indian Coast Guard's Dist HQ -1 (South Gujarat Daman & Diu), according to a statement by the Indian Coast Guard.

The ICG ship C-161 arrived in the vicinity of the fishing boat in a short time and launched the rescue and support mission.

Indian Coast Guard acted after an SOS call ***PHOTO: ANI***

The ICG team stopped flooding in the boat temporarily and the half-submerged boat was tried to be towed by another fishing boat in the vicinity. However, the fishing boat that was already 75 per cent flooded, sank 12 km off Porbandar, the Indian Coast Guard said in a statement.

The ICG ship rescued all five crew members and medical support was provided to them. The survivors were brought to Porbander and handed over to the Fisheries Association.

Earlier on March 20, the Indian Coast Guard carried out a rescue operation of eight crew members from a flooded boat after receiving a distress call off the coast of Kundapura in Karnataka.

"In a swift operation @ IndiaCoastGuard Ship Rajdoot rescued 08 crew of distressed IFB Ajmeer-I (IND-KA-02-MM-4882) 10 NM west of #Kundapura on 20 Mar which had a major flooding at sea. Indian Coast Guard Ship Rajdoot reassured the crew & provided de-flooding assistance," the Indian Coast Guard said in a post on X.

It further said that the disabled boat was handed over to the IFB Goat Fish boat for further towing towards the Gangoli harbour. "After confirming safety of boat and crew it handed over the disabled boat to buddy boat IFB Gold Fish (IND-KA-03-MM-4566) for further towing towards #Gangoli harbour. Boat and crew safely entered harbour under tow #WeProtect," it added. ***—PTI***

COLOURS OF INDIA

Youngsters celebrate Holi in Hyderabad; People play with colours and dance during Holi celebrations in Navi Mumbai; Children have a ball in New Delhi; A women plays with her friends during 'Basant Utsav' celebrations, in Kolkata on Monday ***PHOTOS: PTI***

HOLI IN LOS ANGELES

Devotees dance and throw coloured powder as they celebrate Holi, the Hindu festival of colours, in the Encino section of Los Angeles on Sunday
PHOTO:PTI

Are Hong Kong's days as global business hub over?

There is a new running joke in Hong Kong: locals mock their city for losing its status as the darling of global capital. As one joked, it is the newest UNESCO world heritage site.

A tough security law - Article 23 - that came into effect over the weekend has only renewed the underlying concerns.

Authorities say it will protect the city and ensure stability, while critics are alarmed it will silence all dissent with its closed-door trials and life sentences for broadly-defined offences - from insurrection to treason.

Hong Kong was ranked as number one IPO venue in 15 years but now is in eighth spot ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

What is Hong Kong's Article 23 security law?

Hong Kong's Article 23, which expands on national security legislation imposed by China in 2020, comes at a time when the city's administration is trying to reassure the world that it's still a financial dynamo.

The Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce argued it "will make Hong Kong a safer destination for local and foreign businesses and professionals operating" in the city, while Hong Kong's chief executive John Lee had dismissed as "ridiculous" the notion that the administration only cared about national security, calling such concerns a form of "soft resistance".

Hong Kong's economy has been reeling from Beijing's crackdown since the pro-democracy protests in 2019 and a harsh zero-Covid policy. Rentals for commercial and retail spaces have fallen, leaving office buildings and shopfronts vacant. There are fewer tourists - last year's arrivals were only 60% of the pre-pandemic figure.

The value of the Hang Seng index - Hong Kong's crown jewel - has fallen by more than 40% since 2019. India overtook the city in January to become the world's fourth-largest stock market. Singapore has emerged as a stiff regional rival for finance. Global banks have been laying off people focused on Hong Kong and China, pointing to sluggish growth and plummeting investor confidence.

One country, two systems

The former British colony has been run under the principle of "one country, two systems" since its return to China in 1997. Beijing promised that Hong Kong would enjoy civil liberties for half a century.

But critics say it has reneged on the deal, crushing pro-democracy protests and imposing a national security law (NSL) in 2020 under which more than 260 people, including former lawmakers, have been arrested. Authorities defend it, saying it marked the transition from "chaos to governance".

To invest or not

The city should not be discounted as an international financial hub, says Kevin Tsui, chief economist at the research firm Orientis. He adds that Hong Kong should make use of its advantages - a simple, low-rate tax system, and the fact that it's the only Chinese city with no foreign exchange controls. The Hong Kong dollar is also pegged to the US dollar, providing financial stability.

"Even if Hong Kong is just a Chinese city, foreigners want to do business with China," he says.

And yet confidence in the city has been shaken, not least because it is also feeling the heat of a slowing Chinese economy, which has been hit by debt and a property market crisis.

The mainland is the city's biggest trading partner and second-largest source of investment. Half of the 2,600 companies listed on Hong Kong's stock market are from mainland China.

But a new rule Beijing introduced last year requires Chinese companies to have official approval to list overseas. This has made the process far more cumbersome, said a banker who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "We can only wait because we have no idea about the progress.

If the companies are involved in sensitive industries such as data security or genetic technology, the process will be extremely slow," he said. Hong Kong, which ranked as the world's number one IPO venue in seven of the last 15 years, is now in the eighth spot, according to industry reports.

"Beijing wants private companies to raise funds internationally to salvage the economy, but at the same time it worries these companies will no longer be under [their] control after listing," says the banker who wanted to remain anonymous. "They want to control everything, but it will kill the financial market eventually." *—BBC News*

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

Fast fashion is contributing to global sustainability crisis

Since the 1990s, fast fashion has enabled everyday people to buy the latest catwalk trends. But the sheer volume of garments being whipped up, sold and soon discarded is contributing to a global sustainability crisis.

Now, just when the fashion industry should be waking up and breaking free of this vicious cycle, it's heading in the opposite direction. We're on a downward spiral, from fast fashion to ultra-fast fashion. The amount of natural resources consumed and waste produced is snowballing.

Ultra-fast fashion is marked by even faster production cycles, blink-and-you'll-miss-it trends, and poor labour practices. Brands like Shein, Boohoo and Cider are liberated from the concept of seasonal collections. Instead they are producing garments at breakneck speeds and self-generating microtrends such as balletcore, Barbiecore and even mermaidcore. At the same time there is limited transparency or accountability around clothing supply chains.

The overproduction and consumption of clothing cannot be allowed to continue. Without change, the industry will account for 26% of the world's carbon budget for limiting global warming to 2°C by 2050. The fashion industry must take responsibility for its actions. Policymakers also have an important role to play in enabling the necessary shift towards a more responsible and circular fashion economy. And let's not forget the power of consumers.

Cheap clothing at what cost?

It was once thought the pandemic would trigger a transition to a more sustainable fashion industry. Unfortunately in reality the industry is getting worse, not better.

Most ultra-fast fashion brands emerged in the late 2010s following the most well known, Shein, founded in 2008. These online, direct-to-consumer brands exploded in popularity during lockdowns, with Shein holding the title of the world's most popular brand in 2020.

Established brands such as Gap introduce 12,000 new items a year and H&M 25,000. But Shein leaves them in the dust, listing 1.3 million items in the same amount of time. How is this even possible?

The ultra-fast fashion model thrives on data and addictive social media marketing to create insatiable consumer demand.

A seamless transition to sustainability

The Australian Fashion Council is leading a national product stewardship scheme called Seamless that promises to transform the fashion industry by 2030.

The idea is to bring fashion into the circular economy. Ultimately that means zero waste, but in the meantime raw materials would be kept in the supply chain for as long as possible by designing out and minimising waste.

Members will contribute a four-cent levy for every clothing item they produce or import.

These funds go into clothing collection, research, recycling projects and education campaigns.

The critical crackdown

Some brands are actively engaged and working towards a more sustainable future. But others such as Temu are learning from Shein and looking to emulate their business model.

The transition to a more sustainable and responsible fashion industry requires a greater understanding of ultra-fast fashion, urgent systemic changes and collective efforts.Last month, Federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek announced a potential intervention, perhaps by introducing minimum environmental standards or a clothing levy by July.

The clock is ticking. It is time to lay the foundation for a more sustainable and just fashion industry. Australia has a rich fashion history and is home to many leading local brands – many of whom have gone global. These brands show us what is possible when good design, sustainability and innovation drive an industry.

Ultimately, our collective choices wield immense power. By understanding the consequences of our fashion habits and advocating for change, we can all be catalysts for a more sustainable and just fashion industry.

—The Conversation

Fashion industry will account for 26 per cent of the world's carbon budget by 2050 ***PHOTO: EARTH.ORG***

Afghan soldiers turn barbers, gym trainers to escape Taliban

It is almost 5.40 in the evening. A hair salon in New Delhi's bustling New Friends Colony neighbourhood is alive with the sound of buzzing clippers and chattering customers. The air is thick with the scent of hair spray and aftershave.

Zaki Marzai, 29, stands behind a barber's brown chair, his hands moving with precision as he snips a customer's hair.

Wooden shelves on the walls bear colourful bottles of shampoo and styling products.

The mirrors reflect Marzai, his eyes focused on the hair before him. His customer looks satisfied.

Marzai, though, would rather be elsewhere – with a rifle in his hand, not a razor.

Three years ago, Marzai was a soldier in the elite special force of Afghanistan's army, fighting the Taliban in a war that started with the United States and NATO forces invading the country in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

The Western-backed Afghan government had sided with the US in the 20-year war. Marzai joined the army in 2015 as a sergeant and was on track to become a commissioned officer.

Everything changed on 20 June, 2018.

'Sitting ducks'

At about 2am that day, Marzai was stationed outside a camp in Ghazni province of Afghanistan when a barrage of bullets hit him and his fellow soldiers.

Before Marzai and his comrades could realise what happened, 25 soldiers had died on the spot and six others had been injured. Bullets had pierced through Marzai's chin and right leg.

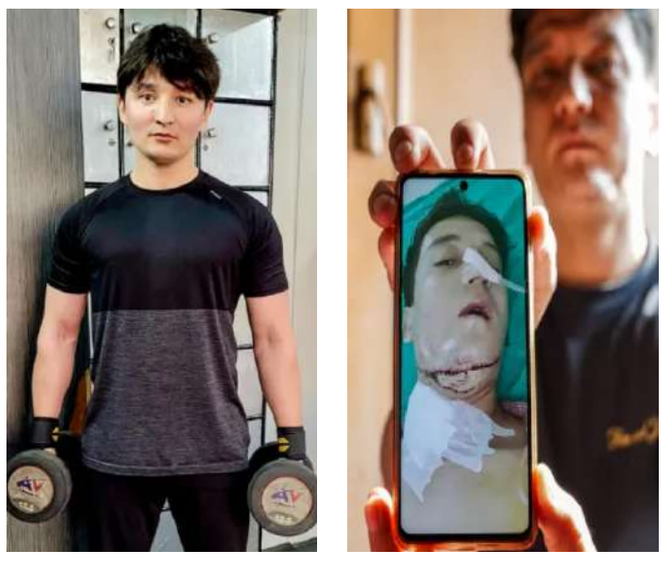
It was eight hours before any backup arrived to rescue the wounded. Marzai, who had lost a lot of blood, was first taken to a nearby hospital in Ghazni and soon transferred to a hospital in Kabul for further treatment on his jaw.

After nearly a year of treatment, his jaw was still deformed, so the Afghan government sent him to India for better care. He left behind his parents, a sister and seven brothers.

'I cried all night'

As the Taliban grabbed control of province after province in Afghanistan in early August, Marzai was following the news on his phone, watching YouTube, tracking Twitter and waiting for Facebook updates.

Marzai is from Ghazni, an Afghan province dominated by the Shia Hazara community, which has been persecuted by the mainly Sunni Taliban for a long time.



Former Afghan soldier Esmatullah Asil works as a gym trainer in Delhi and Zaki Marzai show his picture after the attack ***PHOTO: AL JAZEERA***

And he is a former soldier for a government that the Taliban viewed as the enemy. Since August 2021, despite a general amnesty announced by the Taliban after its takeover, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported that at least 200 former Afghan soldiers and government officials have been killed extrajudicially by the new authority.

'We couldn't return'

Khalil Shamas, a 27-year-old former lieutenant who now works as a waiter at a New Delhi restaurant, arrived in India in 2020 for training at the elite Indian Military Academy (IMA) in Dehradun, the hilly capital of India's northern state of Uttarakhand. By the time he and his colleagues completed the course, the Afghan army had ceased to exist on the ground.

He says there were about 200 Afghan soldiers training at the IMA. A few returned to Afghanistan. Many others migrated to Iran, Canada, the US and Europe.

But at least 50 of them stayed back in India – unable to get visas to the West, and too scared to return to Afghanistan.

- According to the International Rescue Committee, up to 300,000 Afghans had been associated with US operations in Afghanistan since 2001. Since the withdrawal of the US, approximately 88,500 Afghans have been resettled in US, according to US Department of Homeland Security, while thousands more have applied, seeking asylum.

In November last year, the Afghan embassy in New Delhi, which was led by diplomats appointed by the elected government that the Taliban overthrew, announced that it was shutting down, accusing the Indian government of no longer cooperating with it.

Now, in addition to no longer receiving financial support from the mission, the Afghan soldiers also have nowhere to go for paperwork to authenticate that they were once part of their country's army.

According to a 2023 report by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), India is home to more than 15,000 Afghan refugees. Nearly 1,000 of those are Afghans who took shelter in India after the Taliban came to power in 2021.

'My dream came crashing down'

Asil, another former Afghan soldier, begins his day at 7am. Dressed in a black sports T-shirt and trousers, he hurries to work where young boys and girls wait for his instructions.

Asil, 27, is a gym trainer in South Delhi's Lajpat Nagar, home to hundreds of Afghan migrants who have opened restaurants, shops and pharmacies there.

While at the IMA, Asil used to visit the academy's gym, where he learned bodybuilding. It was a skill that came in handy when he then sought work at the Lajpat Nagar gym.

'Never tastes like home'

In their free time, Asil and Shamas visit each other's homes, recalling with nostalgia their days of hope and dreams at the IMA, where they first met. Conversations often end up veering towards the state of present-day Afghanistan – and the realisation that they need to distract themselves.

According to the International Rescue Committee, up to 300,000 Afghans had been associated with US operations in Afghanistan since 2001. Since the withdrawal of the US, approximately 88,500 Afghans have been resettled in the US, according to the US Department of Homeland Security, while thousands more have applied, seeking asylum.

While the Afghan army they once served no longer exists, they can't get rid of the habits they picked up over years of training. *—Al Jazeera*

Taiwan detects 7 Chinese ships, 5 military aircraft

TAIPEI, 25 MARCH

The Taiwan Ministry of National Defence (MND) said that it detected seven Chinese naval vessels and five Chinese military aircraft operating around the nation from 6 am (local time) on Sunday to 6 am (local time) on Monday, Taiwan News reported. According to Taiwan's MND, one of the PLA aircraft entered Taiwan's Southwest Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). Taiwan's armed forces have monitored the situation and deployed appropriate forces to respond. On March 24, Taiwan's defence ministry seems to have witnessed an increase in Chinese military presence around the nation with the MND detecting eight Chinese naval vessels and six Chinese military aircraft operating around the nation from 6 am on 23 March to 6 am, as per Taiwan News. *—ANI*

Indian student dies after being hit by truck in London

LONDON, 25 MARCH

An Indian student died after being run over by a truck while cycling back to her apartment in London last week, according to a social media post by Niti Aayog former CEO Amitabh Kant. The 33-year-old Cheistha Kochhar was a PhD student at the London School of Economics, her father retired Lieutenant General Dr SP Kochhar said in a post on LinkedIn. Kochhar, who had previously worked with the public policy think-tank NITI Aayog, was pursuing her PhD in Behavioural Science from LSE. Amitabh Kant in his post on X said that Cheistha Kochhar had worked with him on the LIFE programme in Niti Aayog. He described her bright, brilliant brave and always full of life. "Cheistha Kochar worked with me on the #LIFE programme in @ NITIAayog." *—ANI*

Death toll from heavy rains in S Brazil jumps to 23

RIO DE JANEIRO, 25 MARCH

Heavy rains in Brazil this weekend killed at least 23 people in the southeastern states of Rio de Janeiro and Espirito Santo. Espirito Santos' state government said Sunday that 15 people died and almost 5,000 were out of their homes due to heavy rains falling since Friday night. Rio authorities reported eight deaths Saturday. Thirteen deaths in Espirito Santo were registered in Mimoso do Sul, a countryside city 74 kilometers south of the state capital, Vitoria. Rescue teams in both states had to stop their work Friday night because of risks of new landslides, with efforts restarting Saturday afternoon. Mayors and governors of Brazil's southeast region had alerted residents of potential problems for the weekend. *—AP*

Harris, 37, set to be youngest Irish PM

DUBLIN, 25 MARCH

Simon Harris has been confirmed as the new leader of Irish political party Fine Gael, paving the way for the 37-year-old to become Ireland's youngest Prime Minister. Harris, an Irish government minister, was the only candidate to seek the party leadership. He is replacing Leo Varadkar, who announced on Wednesday he was stepping down as party leader and Prime Minister. Harris said becoming Fine Gael leader was "the honour of my life". He thanked the party and those that elected him for trusting him, adding that he will "repay that trust in hard work". Harris later told the members that "this is a moment for Fine Gael to reset, it is a moment for Fine Gael to reconnect". *—BBC News*

4 men charged with Moscow hall attack

The 'act of terrorism' killed at least 137

MOSCOW, 25 MARCH

Russia has charged four men it says attacked a Moscow concert hall and killed at least 137 people.

All four appeared to have been beaten and one was brought to court in a wheelchair. They were charged with committing an act of terrorism.

The Islamic State group (IS), said it carried out Friday's outrage at Crocus City Hall and posted video evidence.

Russian officials have claimed, without evidence, Ukrainian involvement. Kyiv says the claim is "absurd". The graphic video released by IS, showing attackers firing on the crowd inside the concert hall, has been verified as genuine by BBC.

However, no Russian official has acknowledged the claim, and Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in a news conference on Monday that it was inappropriate to comment on it until the investigation had been completed.

He also said that because of the tense international situation there was little collaboration between countries on fighting terrorism. France has raised its terror alert to the highest level, with President Macron saying on Monday that the Islamic State group behind the Moscow attack had also recently been targeting France.

Suspects in the Crocus City Hall shooting on Friday stand inside the Russian Investigative Committee headquarters in Russia **PHOTO: PTI**

Rescuers are continuing to search the rubble of the concert hall for victims, and regional officials said the operation would carry on through Tuesday afternoon. The four suspects were named by Russian authorities as Dalerdzhon Mirzoyev, Saidakrami Murodali Rachabalizoda, Shamsidin Fariduni and Muhammadsobir Fayzov.

Video showed three of them being marched bent double by masked police into Basmanny district court in the Russian capital. All appeared to have been beaten - videos of brutal interrogation sessions were apparently leaked by Russian security forces, and reports suggest at least one had suffered electric shocks.

Asked about the alleged torture, Peskov refused to comment. The men the court identified as Mirzoyev and Rachabalizoda had black eyes and the latter's ear was heavily bandaged - reportedly from it being partially severed during his arrest.

—BBC News

UKRAINE SAYS IT HIT 2 RUSSIAN NAVAL VESSELS

KYIV, 25 MARCH

Ukraine said it hit two Russian naval vessels along with a communications centre and several other facilities belonging to the Black Sea Fleet on the Crimean port of Sevastopol in an overnight attack, CNN reported.

A video shared on a local Telegram channel showed large explosions in Sevastopol, sending thick black smoke and fireballs into the air. A fireball was visible at a distance.

Ukraine said the vessels that were targeted were two amphibious landing ships - the Yamal and the Azov, according to the CNN report. The extent of the damage suffered by the Russian vessels is not clear yet.

Ukrainian air force commander Mykola Oleshchuk thanked the pilots and navy for their successful combat work. In a post on X, Mykola Oleshchuk stated, "The sky and the sea are of the same colour! I thank the pilots and navy for their successful combat work! Crimea is ours! To the victory together!"

Russian defence officials have not issued any statements on the attack. However, Russian politician and Sevastopol governor Mikhail Razvozhayev on his Telegram channel described it as the "most massive attack in recent times." Without mentioning details regarding the military sites that were hit, Razvozhayev said one person had been killed in the attack. He said maritime and ground transportation in the city had been "partially damaged," according to CNN report. *—ANI*

1,000 HOMES DESTROYED

Landslides caused by the powerful quake are making it difficult for rescue teams to reach people **PHOTO: ARAB TIMES**

6.9 quake jolts Papua New Guinea

PORT MORESBY, 25 MARCH

A magnitude 6.9 earthquake has hit a remote part of western Papua New Guinea killing at least three people and causing extensive damage to around 1,000 homes, officials said.

The quake rocked the East Sepik region at about 6.20 am Sunday (2020 GMT Saturday) near the town of Ambunti, about 756 kilometres northwest of the capital of Port Moresby, and at a depth of about 40 kilometres, according to reports by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

East Sepik province Governor Allan Bird posted on Facebook Sunday that initial estimates show the earthquake had destroyed about 1,000 homes in the area which was already "dealing with widespread flooding" from earlier in March.

"The flooding actually covers an area more than 800 kilometres long, and so there's about maybe 60 or 70 villages involved all along the Sepik River," Bird told the ABC on Monday. Local emergency crews were already active in the region because of the flooding when the earthquake struck.

"The floods weren't their biggest problem. They were confidently dealing with that because it's something they're used to," Bird said. "It was the earthquake that no one was prepared for. That would have caused the most significant damage now."

Bird said shelter, clean water, food and canvases to keep belongings dry were the most immediate pressing needs for the village communities.Papua New Guinea, a South Pacific island nation located to the north of Australia, was hit with two earthquakes in April last year, including a magnitude 7.0 quake that killed four people in a remote northern part of the country.

A magnitude 7.6 quake that struck a remote area of the island in September 2022 was later found to have killed 21 people.

It is located on the eastern half of the island of New Guinea and sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," the arc of seismic faults around the Pacific Ocean where much of the world's earthquake and volcanic activity occurs. *—AP*

Al-Qaeda attack in Yemen kills 5 loyal to a secessionist group

SANAA, 25 MARCH

An attack by al-Qaida in southern Yemen killed at least two troops loyal to a secessionist group, officials said Monday, in the first attack since the extremist group's branch in the Arab country announced the death of its leader earlier this month.

The attack, which took place late Sunday in the mountainous Wadi Omran area of Abyan province, also wounded four troops from the Southern Armed Forces, which is loyal to the secessionist Southern Transitional Council, according to a statement from the southern forces. The separatist council is backed by the United Arab Emirates and controls much of Yemen's south. It is at odds with the internationally recognised government, although they are allies in the war against the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels.

The statement said the militants ambushed a security patrol in the area, triggering hours-long gunbattles. The militants burned a military vehicle, according to Lt. Col. Khalid Alwai. The ambush came as the southern forces have intensified their attacks in recent weeks on an al-Qaida stronghold in Wadi Omran, the statement said.

The al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula group, or AQAP, claimed responsibility for the attack. The claim was posted on al-Qaida-linked channels on Telegram with images of the burned vehicle.

AQAP is seen as one of the more dangerous branches of the extremist group that is still operating more than a decade after the killing of founder Osama bin Laden. Yemen's ruinous civil war began in 2014 when the Houthis seized the capital of Sanaa and much of northern Yemen and forced the internationally recognised government into exile.

Sunday's attack came after AQAP announced the death of its leader, Khalid al-Batarfi, earlier this month, without giving details. It named Saad bin Atef al-Awlaki as the new leader of the group. *—AP*

JAPAN'S PRIME MINISTER PROPOSES SUMMIT WITH KIM

SEOUL, 25 MARCH

North Korea said Monday that Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has proposed a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Kim's sister and senior official, Kim Yo Jong, made the comments in a state media dispatch. She said Kishida used an unspecified channel to convey his position that he wants to meet Kim Jong Un in person at an early date. Kim Yo Jong said whether to improve bilateral ties hinges on Japan. She said if Kishida sticks to his push to resolve the alleged past abductions of Japanese nationals by North Korea, he cannot avoid criticism that he would only pursue talks to boost his popularity. Some experts say North Korea is seeking to improve ties with Japan as a way to weaken a trilateral Tokyo-Seoul-Washington security partnership, while Kishida also wants better ties with North Korea to increase his declining approval rating at home. The US and South Korea have been expanding their military drills and trilateral exercises involving Japan in response to North Korea's provocative run of weapons tests since 2022. *—AP*

- N Korea is seeking to improve ties as a way to weaken a Tokyo-Seoul-Washington security partnership

South Korean doctors protest against the government's medical policy in front of the Presidential office in Seoul **PHOTO: AP**

S Korea doctors quit over high medical school fees

SEOUL, 25 MARCH

Senior doctors at dozens of hospitals in South Korea planned to submit their resignations Monday in support of medical interns and residents who have been on a strike for five weeks over the government's push to sharply increase medical school admissions, their leader said.

The senior doctors' action won't likely cause an immediate worsening of hospital operations in South Korea because they have said they would continue to work even after submitting their resignations. But prospects for an early end to the medical impasse were also dim, as the doctors' planned action comes after President Yoon Suk Yeol called for talks with doctors while suggesting a possible softening of punitive steps against the striking junior doctors.

About 12,000 interns and medical residents have faced impending suspensions of their licenses over their refusal to end their strikes, which have caused hundreds of cancelled surgeries and other treatments at their hospitals. *—AP*

Oppn's Faye leads in Senegal Prez race

DAKAR, 25 MARCH

Opposition leader Bassirou Diomaye Faye is leading the race in Senegal's presidential election, according to local media.

Several of the 17 candidates have conceded to him, however official results have not yet been announced. Millions took part in a peaceful vote on Sunday, following three years of turbulence and opposition protests against the incumbent, Macky Sall.

The ruling coalition's choice,

Diomaye Faye **PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA**

Amadou Ba, has denied that he has lost. He said he expected to contest a run-off vote to decide a winner. This would be required if no candidate gets more than 50% of the vote. Faye, 44, a senior official in the Pastef party led by Ousmane Sonko, had been in jail until 10 days before the vote. Sonko was disqualified from the race because of a defamation conviction, which he said was politically motivated.

The first set of tallies announced on television showed Faye had won the majority of votes, triggering widespread street celebrations in the capital, Dakar. Supporters set off fireworks, waved Senegalese flags and blew vuvuzelas. *—BBC News*

The aid has been provided to meet the needs of beneficiaries in delivering meals to their children **PHOTO: WFP**

6M Afghans received aid from WFP last month

KABUL, 25 MARCH

The World Food Programme (WFP) recently announced that six million people in Afghanistan have received aid over the past month, according to Khaama Press.

The United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP) on Saturday that WFP has provided cash and food assistance to over six million people in Afghanistan. The aid has been provided to meet the needs of beneficiaries in delivering meals to their children.

It has been able to provide this assistance with the help of financial support from some private donors and cooperating countries. This comes after the UNWFP highlighted that economic challenges and humanitarian crises in Afghanistan have increased the demand for food aid. Amid a dire humanitarian crisis, Afghan refugees are returning from Pakistan in significant numbers. The deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, including ongoing conflict and economic instability, has prompted many refugees to seek repatriation despite the uncertain conditions awaiting them, as reported. *—ANI*

Pak to start 2nd repatriation of Afghans

ISLAMABAD, 25 MARCH

Even as confusion prevails about the exact number of undocumented Afghans sent back from Pakistan to their country, preparations are afoot to launch the second phase of repatriation aimed at nearly one million 'documented' Afghans, a media report said on Monday.

The Interior Ministry had already issued directives to district authorities and police to expedite the mapping, and collecting data of the whereabouts of the Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders and given Monday, as the deadline to complete the exercise, the Dawn newspaper reported quoting documents it had accessed.

Pakistan launched the first round of repatriation of what it called "undocumented aliens" in November last year. Although no date has yet been announced, the campaign to repatriate hundreds of thousands of ACC holders could begin in early to mid-summer, following the approval from the federal government. *—PTI*

'PROPAGANDA BOOST'

Thailand sends aid to Myanmar, but critics say it will help Junta

MAE SOT, 25 MARCH

Thailand delivered its first batch of humanitarian aid to war-torn Myanmar on Monday, in what officials hope will be a continuing effort to ease the plight of millions of people displaced by fighting.

But critics charge that the aid will benefit only people in areas under the Myanmar military's control, providing it with a propaganda boost while leaving the vast majority of displaced people in contested areas without access to assistance.

Myanmar is wrecked by a nationwide armed conflict that began after the army ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021 and suppressed widespread nonviolent protests that sought a return to democratic rule. The fighting has displaced millions of people and battered the economy.

Thailand sent 10 trucks over the border from the northern province on Monday **PHOTO: AP**

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Thailand sent ten trucks over the border from the northern province of Tak, carrying some 4,000 packages of aid to three towns in Kayin State, also known as Karen State, where it will be distributed to approximately 20,000 displaced people.

The parcels contained aid worth around $ 1,38,000, mostly food, instant beverages and other basic items such as toiletries. More than 2.8 million people in Myanmar are displaced, according to UN agencies, most by fighting that arose after the army's takeover. They say 18.6 million people, including 6 million children, require humanitarian aid. Carl Skau, Chief Operating Officer of the UN's World Food Programme, said earlier this month that one in four of the displaced is at risk of acute food insecurity. *—AP*

Amul to launch four variants of milk in US market

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

For the first time, Amul fresh milk will be available outside India, with the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF) launching four variants of milk in the US market within a week, to cater to Indian diaspora and Asian population. "We have been exporting dairy products for many decades. This is the first time we are launching fresh milk outside India," GCMMF MD Jayen Mehta said. He said "the GCMMF has tied up with 108-year old cooperative organisation Michigan Milk Producers Association (MMPA) to launch fresh milk in the US market," The milk collection and processing will be done by MMPA, while GCMMF will do marketing and branding of Amul fresh milk. "Recipe will be ours. Within one week, Amul Taaza, Amul Gold, Amul Shakti and Amul Slim n Trim will be available in the US market," he said. Mehta said fresh milk will be available in New York, New Jersey, Chicago, Washington, Dallas and Texas among others. *—PTI*

17% more flights in summer schedule than in winter

T'PURAM, 25 MARCH

The International Airport here has announced its summer schedule with 17 per cent more weekly flight operations than the winter schedule. The summer schedule is effective from 31 March to 24 October, 2024. A total of 716 weekly ATMs (Air Traffic Movements) is the highlight of this schedule against 612 in the winter schedule, an airport statement said here Monday. New destinations like Hanimaadhoo in the Maldives will be added, the statement said adding that additional services to Bengaluru, Delhi and Hyderabad in the domestic sector and Abu Dhabi, Dammam, Kuwait, Kuala Lumpur in international destinations are also listed in the new schedule. In the International sector, air traffic movements will increase by 21 per cent from the current level of 268 weekly ATMs to 324 for summer, it said. In the domestic sector, the ATMs will increase by 14 per cent from the current level of 344 weekly ATMs to 392 for summer, the statement said, adding that the number of daily services to Bengaluru will be increased to 10. *—PTI*

MCL registers 200-MT coal production in FY24

BHUBANESWAR, 25 MARCH

Mahanadi Coalfields Ltd (MCL) has achieved the 200-million tonne (MT) coal production mark in the 2023-24 fiscal, officials said Sunday. The MCL has mining operations in Odisha's Angul, Jharsuguda and Sundergarh districts. The company crossed the 200-MT mark on Saturday night. "It gives me immense pleasure to share the news of this extraordinary milestone of 200 million tonnes in coal production. This is not just a number, but a symbol of our commitment, hard work and perseverance," said Chairman-cum Managing Director Uday Anant Kaole. MCL had attained the 100-MT mark in 2009-10, while 150-MT output was achieved in 2021-22. *—PTI*

EAM meets Singapore PM to boost ties

EAM is on a three-day visit to Singapore

SINGAPORE, 25 MARCH

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday called on Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan and other senior ministers and discussed ways to further the strategic bilateral ties, and the situation in the Indo-Pacific and West Asia regions.

Jaishankar is on a three-day visit to Singapore and reached here on Saturday. He addressed the Indian diaspora on Sunday and met with investors on Saturday.

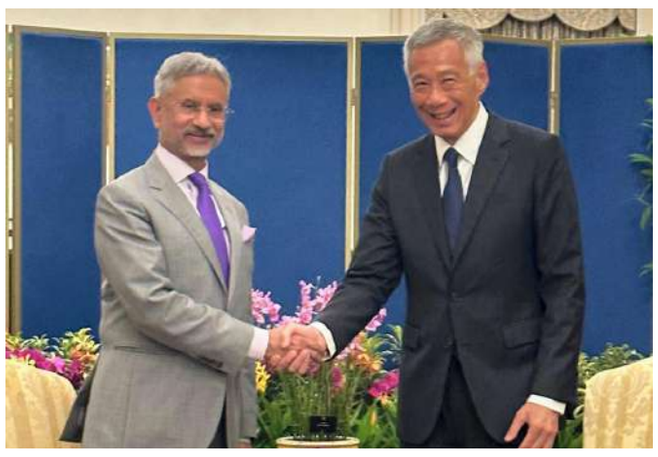
"His positive sentiments on India-Singapore relationship have always been a source of strength for our ties," Jaishankar said about Lee's support the bilateral relationship.

Apart from Foreign Minister Balakrishnan, Jaishankar held separate meetings with Minister of Trade and Industry Gan Kim Yong and Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security Teo Chee Hean.

He also met Finance Minister Lawrence Wong and Minister of Home Affairs & Law K Shanmugam.

Jaishankar, whose day started by meeting Trade and Industry Minister Gan Kim Yong, posted on X after the meeting along with a photo: "Discussed trade, semiconductors, space, green energy, supply chains, and defence. Hope to take these forward in the India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable."

His next meeting was with National Security Minister Teo Chee Hean.



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong during a meeting, in Singapore *PHOTO: PTI*

Before departing from Singapore, he also caught up with Shanmugam.

Earlier on Saturday, Jaishankar told Singapore-based investors of opportunities emerging in the manufacturing sector, especially as India embarks on the journey to build a semiconductor-led industry.

On Sunday, he described the strength of the growing relationship with the city-state at an interaction with some 1,500 Indian diaspora at the newly built Quantum Arena, an auditorium built by an Indian-led education group, in association with the Global Indian International School.

Commenting on Jaishankar Sunday's update to the diaspora, Nimit Shedh from the Singapore Gujarati Society, said, "It was very insightful. Jaishankar is always very insightful and the way he presented India to the diasporav... this brings us very close to India, it helps us get the understanding of the Indian Government views on how they are going to tackle various issues."

Jaishankar will also visit the Philippines and Malaysia.

The 23-27 March visit will focus on enhancing bilateral relations with the three countries, and would provide an opportunity for engagement on regional issues of mutual concern, the Ministry of External Affairs had said before Jaishankar's departure.

—PTI

EAM, SINGAPORE MIN DISCUSS CHIP SECTOR, SPACE

SINGAPORE, 25 MARCH

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held a meeting with Singapore's Minister of Trade and Industry Gan Kim Yong and discussed trade, semiconductors, space, green energy, supply chains and defence.

In a post on X, Jaishankar stated, "Started the day by meeting Singapore Minister of Trade and Industry Gan Kim Yong. Discussed trade, semiconductors, space, green energy, supply chains.and defence. Hope to take these forward in the India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable."

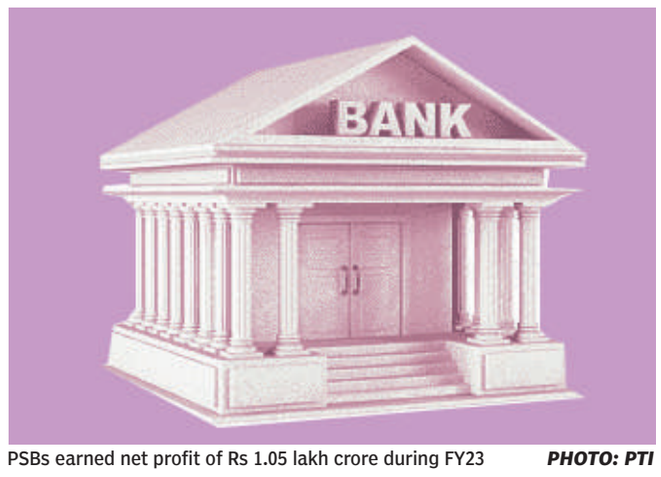
Jaishankar, who is on a visit to Singapore, interacted with Indian community on Sunday. Jaishankar kicked off his Singapore visit on Saturday by paying homage to Subhash Chandra Bose and the brave Indian National Army soldiers.

EAM Jaishankar also engaged in discussions with prominent corporate figures from the country who offered positive feedback on India's growth story derived from their investment experiences.

The relations between India and Singapore are based on shared values and approaches, economic opportunities and convergence of interests on key issues. There are more than 20 regular bilateral mechanisms, dialogues and exercises. *—ANI*

- EAM also engaged in discussions with prominent corporate figures from the country who offered positive feedback on India's growth from ther experiences

PROFITABILITY IMPROVES



PSBs earned net profit of Rs 1.05 lakh crore during FY23 *PHOTO: PTI*

Public Sector Banks' dividend may exceed ₹15,000 cr this FY

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Public sector banks (PSBs) are likely to pay a dividend in excess of Rs 15,000 crore for the financial year ending March 2024 on the back of improved profitability, according to sources.

In the first three quarters of the current financial year, all 12 PSBs earned a total profit of Rs 98,000 crore, only Rs 7,000 crore less than the entire FY23.

PSBs earned the highest-ever aggregate net profit of Rs 1.05 lakh crore during FY23 compared to Rs 66,539.98 crore earned in 2021-22.

As a result, the government earned a dividend of Rs 13,804 crore, 58 per cent higher than the Rs 8,718 crore paid out in the previous financial year.

Since the profit in the current financial year would be much higher than the previous year, so will be the dividend payout to the government, sources said.

Going by the past record, the dividend payout for FY24 should be in excess of Rs 15,000 crore, they added.

As per the prevailing norms last updated in 2005, banks need to have an NNPA ratio of up to 7 per cent to become eligible for declaration of dividends.

The central bank has proposed that the new guidelines should come into effect from FY25 onwards.

The draft lays down directions that need to be followed by banks' boards while considering proposals of dividend payouts, which include consideration on divergence in classification and provisioning for NPAs as well.

—PTI

THE WEEK AHEAD

On Monday the exchanges remained closed due to the festival of Holi *PHOTO: PTI*

Traders brace for short 3-day trading

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

- The BSE holiday calendar for 2024 lists trading holidays for a total of 14 days. Equity markets will remain closed on two occasions in April

Indian stock exchanges are braced for a challenging week with just three trading days in the week. On Monday the exchanges remained closed due to the festival of Holi, while Friday will also be a market Holiday on account of Good Friday.

The BSE Sensex had clsoed on Friday at a level of 72,831.94. Market vetran Arun Kejriwal in his column on Konnexio Network wrote "The current value of NIFTY is at 22,096.75 points which is a mere 113.95 points or 0.52% higher than the March series open at 21,982.80 points. With three trading sessions to go, and such a volatile market, the series is clearly up for grabs and can go in any direction. If the bulls slip up, they could see the series being lost in next to no time. Expect markets to be super volatile over the next three days which would culminate in the end of the series as well."

The BSE holiday calendar for 2024 lists trading holidays for a total of 14 days. Equity markets will remain closed on two occasions in April. 11 April for Eid and 17 April on the occasion of Ram Navami. Further with Mumbai scheduled to vote on 20 May there is a likelihood of trading being suspended for the day.

On Friday benchmark equity indices saw a recovery from day's low to end on a positive note. The 30-share BSE Sensex added 190.75 points to close at 72,831.94. The NSE Nifty ended the day with gains of 84.80 points at 22,096.75. *—ANI*

EU opens probe into Apple, Meta and Google

BRUSSELS, 25 MARCH

European Union (EU) regulators opened investigations into Apple, Google and Meta on Monday, the first cases under a sweeping new law designed to stop Big Tech companies from cornering digital markets.

The Digital Markets Act (DMA) that took full effect earlier this month is a broad rulebook that targets Big Tech "gatekeeper" companies providing "core platform services." The commission has heard complaints that tech companies' measures to comply have fallen short, European Commission Vice President Margrethe Vestager, the bloc's Competition Chief, said at a press briefing in Brussels.

Regulators are looking into whether Google and Apple are fully complying with the DMA's rules requiring tech companies to allow app developers to direct users to cheaper options available outside their app stores.

Google said that it has made "significant changes" to the way its services operate in Europe to comply with the DMA.

The commission is also investigating whether Apple is doing enough to allow iPhone users to easily change web browsers. Also, it is also looking into Meta's option for European users to pay a monthly fee for ad-free versions of Facebook or Instagram, so they can avoid having their personal data used to target them with online ads. Meta said it will "engage constructively" with the Commission.

The commission said it aims to wrap up its investigations within 12 months. *—PTI*

EPFO adds net 16.02 lakh members in January, says ministry

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Employees'' Provident Fund Organization's (EPFO) added a net 16.02 lakh subscribers in January 2024, according to payroll data released on Sunday.

Around 8.08 lakh members were enrolled for the first time in January 2024, a labour ministry statement said on Sunday.

EPFO provisional payroll highlighted that the EPFO has added 16.02 lakh members on a net basis in January 2024, the ministry said.

A noticeable aspect of the data is the dominance of the 18-25 age group, constituting a significant 56.41 per cent of the total new members added in January 2024 indicating the majority of individuals joining the organized workforce are youth, primarily first-time job seekers.

The payroll data highlighted that approximately 12.17 lakh members exited and subsequently rejoined EPFO.

These members switched their jobs and re-joined the establishments covered under the ambit of EPFO and opted to transfer their accumulations instead of applying for final settlement thus, safeguarding long-term financial well-being and extending their social security protection, it stated. Gender-wise analysis of payroll data unveiled that out of 8.08 lakh new members, around 2.05 lakh are new female members. Also, the net female member addition during the month stood at around 3.03 lakh.

The female member addition is indicative of a broader shift towards a more inclusive and diverse workforce.

Month-on-month comparison of industry-wise data displays growth in the members working in establishments engaged in the industries viz. Financing establishment, Establishment engaged in manufacture & marketing servicing & usage of computers, hospitals etc.

Of the total net membership, around 40.71 per cent is from expert services. *—PTI*

Around 8.08 lakh members were enrolled in January *PHOTO: PTI*

JINDAL STAINLESS TIES UP WITH IIT-KHARAGPUR

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Jindal Stainless Ltd and IIT Kharagpur will jointly work on metallurgical projects like primary alloy production and materials characterisation.

It is an industry-academia collaboration, under which the premier educational institution will offer technical and operational solutions, Jindal Stainless Ltd (JSL) said in a statement on Saturday.

The collaboration will work together on metallurgical projects, such as process optimisation, materials characterisation, and primary alloy production, it said.

"We are committed to shape the trajectory of stainless steel technology and making substantial strides in the industry, contributing to our collective pursuit of an atmanirbhar India," JSL Managing Director Abhyuday Jindal said.

Under the terms of the MoU, IIT Kharagpur will provide technical consultancy and engage in academic and industrial research to enhance productivity and process improvements, JSL said. *—PTI*

BE ALERT

Generative AI could leave users holding the bag for copyright violations

MICHIGAN, 25 MARCH

Generative artificial intelligence has been hailed for its potential to transform creativity, and especially by lowering the barriers to content creation. While the creative potential of generative AI tools has often been highlighted, the popularity of these tools poses questions about intellectual property and copyright protection.

Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT are powered by foundational AI models, or AI models trained on vast quantities of data. Generative AI is trained on billions of pieces of data taken from text or images scraped from the internet.

One problem is that output from an AI tool can be very similar to copyright-protected materials. Leaving aside how generative models are trained, the challenge that widespread use of generative AI poses is how individuals and companies could be held liable when generative AI outputs infringe on copyright protections.

When prompts result in copyright violations

Researchers and journalists have raised the possibility that through selective prompting strategies, people can end up creating text, images or video that violates copyright law. Typically, generative AI tools output an image, text or video but do not provide any warning about potential infringement. This raises the question of how to ensure that users of generative AI tools do not unknowingly end up infringing copyright protection.

The legal argument advanced by generative AI companies is that AI trained on copyrighted works is not an infringement of copyright since these models are not copying the training data; rather, they are designed to learn the associations between the elements of writings and images like words and pixels.

Generative AI is trained on billions of pieces of data taken from text or images scraped from the internet *PHOTO: PTI*

- Leaving aside how generative models are trained, the challenge that widespread use of generative AI poses is how individuals and companies could be held liable when generative AI outputs infringe on copyright protections

Legal scholars have dubbed the challenge in developing guardrails against copyright infringement into AI tools the "Snoopy problem."

Researchers in computer vision have long grappled with the issue of how to detect copyright infringement, such as logos that are counterfeited or images that are protected by patents. Researchers have also examined how logo detection can help identify counterfeit products.

Given that naive users can't be expected to learn and follow best practices to avoid infringing copyrighted material, there are roles for policymakers and regulation. It may take a combination of legal and regulatory guidelines to ensure best practices for copyright safety.

Courtesy, The Conversation

Chhetri to play his 150th int'l match

GUWAHATI, 25 MARCH

Milestone man Sunil Chhetri will be the cynosure of all eyes as India hope to overcome their struggles in front of the goal in the return leg of the 2026 FIFA World Cup Qualifier against Afghanistan here on Tuesday. Igor Stimac, Indian Men's football head coach fired a blank in a disappointing draw in the away leg Group A match in Abha, Saudi Arabia on 22 March against their lower-ranked opponents, extending their goalless run.

It will be imperative from India's point of view that Chhetri, who will be appearing in his 150th international match, rises to the occasion and make his landmark game memorable. Having played his first International in 2005, he has so far earned 149 international caps, 93 goals and 11 trophies for the country, and his team would be too happy to see him score one more time, lead them to victory and brighten their prospects of reaching the third round of the World Cup qualifications, something they have not achieved.

Sunil Chhetri has so far earned 149 international caps, 93 goals and 11 trophies for the country **PHOTO: PTI**

Stimac has prioritised qualification to the third round of World Cup Qualifiers and secure a direct entry into the 2027 AFC Asian Cup but with his team coming off a disappointing campaign in the last continental showpiece, the Croatian will be under pressure and will want his wards to show a lot more desperation, composure and urgency upfront.

India will need at least four points from their next three matches – against Afghanistan today, Kuwait on 6 June and Qatar on 11 June to remain in control of their fate.

"Being chosen to represent your country is a dream of millions of kids when they start kicking the ball, and to make it 150 times is possible only for the GOATs (greatest of all times)," said Stimac. Match starts at 7 pm. *—PTI*

Will resign if we fail to reach 3rd round: Stimac

Guwahati, 25 March

Head coach Igor Stimac on Monday said he will resign from the post if the Indian football team fails to reach the third round of the 2026 FIFA World Cup Qualifiers. Stimac has prioritised qualification to the third round and secure a direct entry into the 2027 AFC Asian Cup. "If I don't take India to the third round I will leave, with my honour on everything that was done here in the five years of work," Stimac said. *—PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS vs GUJARAT TITANS

Time: 7.30 PM

Where To Watch:
Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: MA Chidambaram Stadium, Chennai

Lanka crush B'desh by 328 runs in 1st test

SYLHET, 25 MARCH

Kasun Rajitha claimed 5-56 as Sri Lanka bowled Bangladesh out for 182 in its second innings Monday to clinch a 328-run victory in the first cricket test.

Rajitha, who returned 3-56 in the first innings, finished with career-best match figures of 8-112 in a test match. All 20 Bangladesh wickets were taken by seamers. Mominul Haque played a lonely defiant innings for the hosts, stranded on 87 from 148 deliveries when the final wicket fell in the middle session on Day 4. His innings contained 12 boundaries and a six.

Bangladesh was set an improbable 511-run victory target after Sri Lanka rode on centuries in each innings from Kamindu Mendis and skipper Dhananjaya de Silva. "When we saw it looked like a fast bowling wicket, we went with three seamers," de Silva said. "I think if you can get the new ball moving in any wicket, that's the wicket-taking options for the captain. Rather than going with the spinners, I am happy to go with the fast bowlers." Sri Lanka made early inroads in Monday's morning session when Rajitha trapped Taijul Islam lbw for six in the second over after Bangladesh had resumed at 47-5.

Mominul and Mehidy Hasan combined for a 66-run seventh-wicket stand but Rajitha struck again to break up the partnership. Mehidy scored 33 from 50 deliveries before he played an expansive drive and got a thick outside edge. *—PTI*

Virat's touch and class of Karthik help RCB win

RCB beat Punjab Kings, win by 4 wickets

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

Virat Kohli produced a quality half-century on a slightly gummy pitch that took the Holi-day crowd on a joyride and the Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a four-wicket victory over Punjab Kings in an IPL match here on Monday.

The 177-run target wasn't a massively tough one, but needed a meticulous scaling down because of the deck's nature. Kohli (77, 49b, 11x4, 2x6) conducted it to near-perfection as RCB made 178 for six with four balls to spare to register their first win of this IPL.

The Royal Challengers needed 47 from 24 balls from that point Dinesh Karthik (28 not out off 10 balls) and 'Impact Player' Mahipal Lomror (17 not out, 8 balls)carried them past the rope with some sensible cricket.

Karthik team's designated finisher showed that he can seamlessly switch from microphone to willow as he walloped Harshal Patel and Arshdeep Singh with minimum fuss to finish it in style. Kohli's innings was not a blemish free effort as he received reprieves on the very first ball on zero and then when he was on 33, and on both the times pacer Sam Curran was the aggrieved party.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru batters Virat Kohli and Dinesh Karthik in action during the match against Punjab on Monday **PHOTO: PTI/ ANI**

But when Kohli bats at such a lofty zone those are momentary distractions – for him and for the fans. He showed that in no little measure, clanking Curran for three more fours after that first drop as 16 runs cascaded in the opening over of the chase.

There were his money shots too – cover drives, swat-flicks, lofts over extra cover as Kohli dismantled the Kings attack all alone.

But a shot stood out from the rest for its sheer timing and execution. Rabada, who was otherwise superb for a 2/23 figure, pitched one slightly short, and Kohli danced down to magnificently flay the offering over the covers for a four. *—PTI*

Chennai to host final, Ahmedabad gets play-offs

New Delhi, 25 March

Chennai was on Monday named venue of this year's IPL final on 26 May and was also awarded hosting rights of the second qualifier on 24 May as the BCCI unveiled the tournament's complete schedule, factoring in the polling dates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Chennai has been awarded the final by virtue of Chennai Super Kings being the defending champions. The title-holders get to host the opening and the final game of the tournament as established convention. *—PTI*

OLYMPICS TASTER

Paris race celebrates waiters and waitresses

PARIS, 25 MARCH

Usain Bolt's sprint world records were never in danger. Then again, even the world's fastest-ever human likely wouldn't have been so quick while balancing a tray with a croissant, a coffee cup and a glass of water through the streets of Paris, and without spilling it everywhere.

France's capital resurrected a 110-year-old race for its restaurant servers Sunday. The dash through central Paris celebrated the dexterous and, yes, by their own admission, sometimes famously moody men and women without whom France wouldn't be France.

Why? Because they make France's cafés and restaurants tick. Without them, where would the French gather to put the world to rights over drinks and food? Where would they quarrel and fall in (and out of) love? And where else could they simply sit and let their minds wander? They have penned songs and poems about their "bistrots," so attached are they to their unpretentious watering holes that for generations have nourished their bodies and souls.

"That is where you will find the population's fine flowers," sang songwriter-poet Georges Brassens, but also "all the miserable, the down on their luck." *—AP*

Border-Gavaskar Trophy extended to 5 tests

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The latest edition of the marquee Border-Gavaskar Trophy was on Monday extended by a match with India and Australia set to play five Tests later this year for the first time since the 1991-92 season, announced the Cricket Australia (CA).The full schedule for the 2024-25 series is set to be released in the coming days. BCCI and CA jointly announced the development. "Our ongoing collaboration with Cricket Australia in extending the Border-Gavaskar Trophy to five Tests underscores our collective commitment to nurturing and elevating Test cricket's significance. "This extension echoes our shared vision to amplify the essence of Test cricket and uphold its legacy," he added. In the past four series between the two teams, India have won on all four occasions, including back-to-back away Test series wins in 2018-19 and 2020-21. Perth is set to host the opening Test of the five-match series this year. CA is yet to come out with the final schedule but the series is likely to start in late November this year. *—PTI*

Odisha FC's women league ends on a flawless note

BHUBANESWAR, 25 MARCH

Odisha FC's near-perfect Indian Women's League (IWL) 2023-24 season ended on a flawless note on the lush green turf of Kalinga Stadium when they outclassed Kickstart FC 6-0 to bag their maiden title on Sunday. Packed with National Team stars, the champions, who led 3-0 at halftime, were aided by a hat-trick by former India U17 captain Lynda Kom. While Pyari Xaxa scored a brace, Karthika Angamuthu struck a stunner to complete the rout. Lynda and Pyari combined to slam in three goals within 22 minutes to make sure the championship didn't slip out of their hands and three more in the second half only added to the misery of the Bengaluru-based side and emphasised the dominance Odisha FC displayed in the just-finished campaign. *—ANI*

Malnati wins Valspar C'ship to clinch Masters spot

WASHINGTON, 25 MARCH

American Peter Malnati won his first PGA tournament in almost nine years to qualify for the first Masters of his career.The 36-year-old shot a four-under-par 67 in his final round in Palm Harbor, Florida, to finish on 12 under and clinch the Valspar Championship title. The victory earned him a place in the field at Augusta next month. Malnati's only previous PGA Tour win came in November 2015 at the Sandersons Farms Championship. He started the day two off the pace but five birdies helped him to beat Cameron Young - who bogeyed his final hole - by two strokes. Chandler Phillips and Canada's Mackenzie Hughes tied for third. *—BBC News*

Pankaj Advani gears up to defend CCI Billiards crown

MUMBAI, 25 MARCH

Defending champion Pankaj Advani will be aiming to maintain his winning streak at the upcoming CCI Billiards Classic starting here on Tuesday. Winner of 27 World Championship titles, Advani has displayed far superior skills compared to his rivals as he secured three back to back titles at various CCI events in the past year and half. Bagging the CCI Classic Snooker title in January 2023 and having defended it successfully recently, he is eyeing another conquest in the upcoming tournament. Top Indian cuesists like national champion Dhruv Sitwala, runner-up Sourav Kothari and Maharashtra No 1 Mahesh Jagdale will pose a tough challenge to Advani. *—PTI*

I COULD BARELY MOVE, SAYS FERRARI'S CARLOS SAINZ AFTER COMEBACK WIN IN AUSTRALIA GRAND PRIX

MELBOURNE, 25 MARCH

The Australian Grand Prix champion Carlos Sainz admitted he could "barely move" before boarding his flight to Melbourne to complete a spectacular triumph on his comeback from surgery.

Sainz was ruled out of the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix when he was forced to have an appendectomy the day before the race on 8 March and his participation in Australia was immediately called into question.

Just two weeks after missing the Saudi Arabia race due to appendicitis and needing surgery, Sainz challenged Max Verstappen for pole position at Albert Park and claimed the lead on the second lap as the Red Bull driver battled brake troubles.

The Ferrari driver was unsure whether his body could handle the rigours of the high-speed Albert Park Circuit when he got into the car for practice on Friday, but he gradually improved throughout the weekend before taking advantage of Max Verstappen's early retirement to win Sunday's race. *—ANI*

INDIAN WOMEN'S HOCKEY

Harendra frontrunner to replace Schopman as coach

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Harendra Singh is the frontrunner to replace Janneke Schopman as the Indian women's hockey team coach after he recently appeared for an interview, with the national body suggesting that he is the best person to lift the side following its failure to qualify for the Paris Olympics.

Harendra has served at the same position in the past before being appointed as the United States men's team coach in 2021. "Yes, Harendra is in line to replace Janneke. Hockey India is keen to appoint him. He knows the structure of Indian hockey having coached both the men's and women's teams in the past. He is the best person to take the women's side to where it belongs," a source in the national federation told PTI.

Harendra Singh **PHOTO: X**

"Moreover, it is in his best interest also having been out of the country for the past couple of years. The only issue which remains is negotiation of salary because he is drawing a handsome amount in the US and it remains to be seen whether it can be matched." Hockey India secretary-general Bhola Nath Singh confirmed that Harendra appeared for the interview but said his appointment is not yet confirmed as there are other candidates as well.

"Yes, Harendra has appeared for the interview but nothing has been decided from our side yet. There are 11-12 candidates and we will decide taking into account every aspect," Bhola Nath told PTI without elaborating further.

According to the Sports Ministry rules, Rs 3 lakh per month is the cap for Indian coaches but it has been learnt that Harendra is demanding more as per his current package with the US team. Harendra has worn many hats in Indian hockey in the past. *—PTI*

MIAMI OPEN 2024

GAUFF AND SWIATEK ADVANCE TO 4TH ROUND

Coco Gauff beats Oceane Dodin and Iga Swiatek beats Linda Noskova in Miami Open, advance for the round of 16th **PHOTO: X/ TENNIS TV**

MIAMI GARDENS, 25 MARCH

Third-ranked Coco Gauff came from behind in the first set to beat Océane Dodin 6-4, 6-0 on Sunday and advance to the fourth round of the Miami Open for the second time in her career.

Gauff won 10 straight games after Dodin took a 4-2 lead in the opening set, thanks partly to nine double-faults by Dodin at critical moments. Gauff has just one loss in her past 23 matches in the United States. That defeat came against Maria Sakkari at Indian Wells earlier this month.

Gauff, who turned 20 on 13 March, is the youngest American player to hold a top-three seed at Miami.

The reigning US Open champion, who is from South Florida, attended the event growing up and said capturing a title there would be special.

"It would be really cool to win here at home," said Gauff, who was born in Delray Beach, Florida.

"I think the best part about winning here is just being able to drive home with the trophy and not have to fly and pack. ... And I'm a Dolphins fan, so maybe if I win here they can win another trophy at the Super Bowl."

In other women's matches, top-ranked Iga Swiatek came from behind to edge No 31 Linda Nosková 6-7 (7), 6-4, 6-4; fifth-ranked Jessica Pegula defeated No. 35 Leylah Fernandez 7-5, 6-4 to reach the round of 16 for the third straight year; and No 24 Sorana Cîrstea beat 11th-ranked Daria Kasatkina 7-5, 6-2. *—AP*

ALCARAZ BEGINS WITH 6-2, 6-1 WIN OVER BAENA

MIAMI GARDENS, 25 MARCH

Indian Wells champion and second-ranked Carlos Alcaraz began his Miami Open campaign with an emphatic 6-2, 6-1 victory over fellow Spaniard Roberto Carballés Baena on Saturday night.

The 20-year-old Alcaraz, who is the reigning Wimbledon champion, dominated the match from start to finish with his impressive speed and agility. He saved all three break points he faced to pick up his seventh straight win. Jannik Sinner advanced to the third round with a 6-3, 6-4 victory over fellow Italian Andrea Vavassori.

The third-ranked Sinner, the Australian Open champion and last year's Miami Open runner-up, had to wait overnight to clinch the opening victory at Miami after rain forced a suspension of the match on Friday with Sinner leading 3-2. "I think it's a lot of difference between here and anywhere else," Sinner said. "Here maybe the court suits me a little bit better because the ball is not that bouncy. But I feel just mentally quite free to play, and I think that's most important." *—AP*